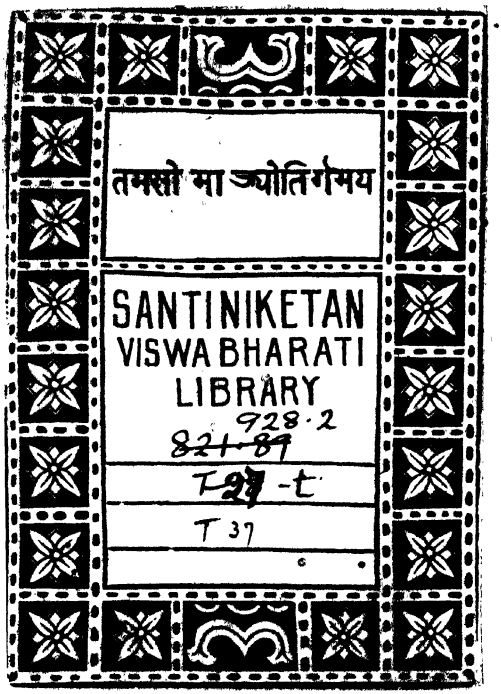

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FRANCIS THOMPSON

POET AND MYSTIC

(*With Notes on* The Hound of Heaven *and other Poems*)



FRANCIS THOMPSON IN 1893

FRANCIS THOMPSON
POET AND MYSTIC

By JOHN THOMSON

LONDON: SIMPKIN MARSHALL
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PREFACE TO FIRST EDITION

THE idea of this brief outline of the life and works of Francis Thompson was suggested by the erection of the commemorative tablet on his birthplace, and by inquiries then made concerning his life and career. I am indebted to Mr Meynell for permission to quote from Thompson's poems, to Sir Alfred Hopkinson for information as to the poet's stay at Owens College, and to the Rev. H. K. Mann (Newcastle-on-Tyne), for leave to reproduce the two photographs of Thompson which appeared in the "Ushaw Magazine" for March 1908. *I am also indebted to the Magazine articles referred to (particularly the "Ushaw Magazine"), and to the prefatory note by Mr Meynell and the "appreciations" in the volume of Selected Poems issued by Messrs Burns & Oates, Orchard Street, London, the Poet's publishers.*

JOHN THOMSON

Preston, September 1912

PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION

NOW that the circle of Francis Thompson's readers is daily widening and the love of his poems has a place, second only to their religion, in the hearts of thousands, there is no need to offer an apology for an enlarged edition of my little work on the great Poet. My special object is to help in making Thompson better known still, and so further his protest against the Materialism of the age, a protest which, in splendour and effectiveness, is unique in English literature.

Give the world, the world. Let me *see*
The light of Heav'n on land and sea
Pregnant of Pow'r that was, and is,
And is to be!

I am indebted to a sister of the Poet, a lady of "great heart and willing mind," for some particulars of the Poet's family not included in the earlier edition.

J. T.

Preston, June 1913

PREFACE TO THIRD EDITION

IN this Edition the Biographical sketch of Francis Thompson has been slightly enlarged—and I am indebted for certain information (mostly of a confirmatory nature) to the "Franciscan Annals" for May and June 1922, *and to Mr Everard Meynell's monumental "Life of Francis Thompson." For the Notes on "The Hound of Heaven" which appeared in the earlier editions have been substituted the somewhat similar but lengthier Notes which formed the substance of a paper read by me before the Literary section of the Preston Scientific Society in November* 1919.

J. T.

Preston, February 1923

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TO FRANCIS THOMPSON

Singer, thy music like a deep stream flows
From mystic heights, and mirrors as it goes
The shades and splendours of that prismy peak
Where poet-dreamers dwell, and tireless seek
Strains most adequate; and thy song is fed
By haunting grandeurs of the cliffs of dread
Thou perforce clomb, a wider world to scan,
And catch lost echoes of the Pipes of Pan:
A Visionary lone on paths sublime
New outposts planting to the realms of Rhyme.

From other sounds aloof thy message rolls,
And men must *hearken for it draws their souls:*
Now thrills with awe, and now with such sweet stress
As linketh heart to heart in tenderness
By dire impellings, none save those may wield,
Whose birth-fused breath is fashioned for the yield—
Great pre-appointed "Prodigals of Song"
This sad world soothing as they sweep along:
Who reach the Faith-crowned gates, and entrance gain
To highest Heaven, through the Arch of Pain!

J. T.

POET AND MYSTIC

(Biographical Sketch)

Go, songs, for ended is our brief, sweet play ;
Go, children of swift joy and tardy sorrow :
And some are sung, and that was yesterday,
And some unsung, and that may be to-morrow.

Go forth ; and if it be o'er stony way,
Old joy can lend what newer grief must borrow :
And it was sweet, and that was yesterday,
And sweet is sweet, though purchasèd with sorrow.

F. THOMPSON

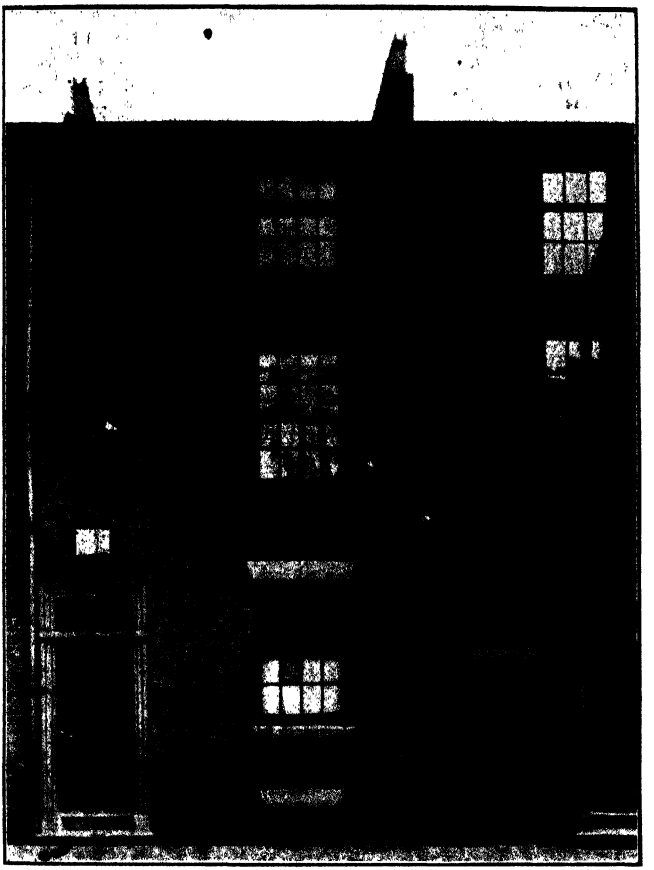
POET AND MYSTIC

FRANCIS THOMPSON, poet and mystic, "master of the lordly line, the daring image, and the lyric's lilt," was born on the 18th December, 1859, in the house (now the office of a firm of solicitors) No. 7 Winckley Street, Preston, and was baptised at St Ignatius' Church, in that town, on the 20th of the same month. His full name, as it appears on the Register of Births, is Francis *Joseph* Thompson; but the first of his poems to be published having been signed "Francis Thompson," the shorter form, that by which he is now universally known, was ever afterwards adhered to. The commemorative tablet placed in August 1910 over the doorway of the poet's birthplace is the gift of Mrs Catherine Holiday, formerly of Preston, (wife of Henry Holiday, the eminent art critic and painter,) whose desire it was that the poet's name should be given in full. Strangely enough the tablet mentioned is the only memorial of its world-famous son in the town of his birth!

The poet's father was Charles Thompson, a doctor of Medicine who had served as House

Surgeon at the Homœopathic Dispensary, Manchester, before settling in Preston—a man (according to a writer in the *Church Times* [1]) firm and kind, but somewhat austere, and with no poetic instinct; his (the poet's) mother, Mary Turner Thompson, *née* Morton. Both parents were Catholics and converts from Anglicanism. One of the doctor's brothers, Edward Healy Thompson, a 'vert to Rome who had been an Anglican curate, attained some little distinction as a writer of theological and controversial works: John Costall Thompson, another brother of the doctor, and a 'vert to Rome also, was the author of a small volume of poems (of no particular merit) entitled "A Vision of Liberty," printed privately in 1848. These were the only literary traditions worth speaking of on either side of the family. Francis was the second of the five children of the marriage between his parents. All five were born in Preston; two died, and are buried, there. Some years after the death, in 1880, of his first wife, the doctor married Anne Richardson, the daughter of a Levenshulme solicitor. There was one child, a son (still living), of the second marriage.

[1] April 21, 1911.



BIRTHPLACE OF FRANCIS THOMPSON
7 WINCKLEY STREET, PRESTON

Showing the Commemorative Tablet over Doorway

Dr Thompson appears to have lived in several houses in Preston—the one in Winckley Street already mentioned; before that (probably from 1856 to 1858) at 12 St Ignatius' Square; and, after the birth of Francis, first in Winckley Square (No. 33a, since merged in the Catholic College buildings) and later at 5 Latham Street. Two of the doctor's children (Mary—now Sister Mary Austin, a Nun, and Helen Mary) were born in Winckley Square—one in 1861, the other in 1862. Whilst residing in Latham Street in 1864 his fourth child, Helen Mary, died, and the fifth child, Margaret Mary, (married and now living in Canada) was born. It is interesting to note that Robert William Service,[1] the "Kipling of Canada," also lived during part of his childhood in the last-named street. Dr Thompson's removal to Ashton-under-Lyne towards the end of 1864, while his three surviving children were so young, will account for that town being sometimes given as our poet's birthplace.[2]

Young Francis was sent on the 22nd of

[1] Mr Service was born at 4 Christian Road, Preston, on the 16th January 1874.

[2] Even the *Ushaw Magazine* (March 1908) refers to Francis Thompson "born at *Ashton-under-Lyne*," etc.

September 1870 to St Cuthbert's College, Ushaw, a Catholic College near Durham, well known as the Alma Mater of Cardinal Wiseman, of the historian Lingard, and of Waterton, the famous naturalist. He had not previously attended school, his education up to this having been conducted at home, at the hands of his mother and the family governess. It was his parents' wish that his college studies should be such as to fit him for the priesthood, or, failing a "vocation," such as would be of assistance to him in the father's profession of Medicine: and instructions were given accordingly to the College Authorities. Our youthful student soon evinced a remarkable love of books, and being specially indulged by his masters in his taste for the reading of the classics, he early distinguished himself in such subjects as their ample reading would naturally improve. Most of his leisure hours were spent in the well-stocked libraries, sometimes, in his seminary days, behind a barrier of books erected as a protection from the "attentions" (catapults, bullets of paper, and the like) of his class-mates. He was not strong enough to take much part in the college games, and only in the racquet courts, at handball, did he attain a proficiency

above the average. His companions relate that he was extremely fond of watching, and was accounted a good judge of, Cricket. Indeed, the "sunlit pitch" had a fascination for him which he never lost. Towards the end of his life he knew all the famous scores of the preceding quarter of a century: after his death, the "averages" of his cricket heroes, extending over thirty years and most carefully compiled, were found among his papers, and with them some verses on the absorbing game, in which the names of Hornby and Barlow appear. The verses, trivial and probably never intended for print, begin:

It is little I repair to the matches of the Southron folk,
Though my own red roses there may blow;
It is little I repair to the matches of the Southron folk,
Though the red roses crest the caps I know.
For the field is full of shades as I near the shadowy coast,
And a ghostly batsman plays to the bowling of a ghost;
And I look through my tears on a soundless, clapping host,

As the run-stealers flicker to and fro,
To and fro,
O my Hornby and my Barlow, long ago.

The lines are not dated, but seem to have been called forth by an incident which occurred not long before the poet's death. It would appear that he had been invited to Lord's to see Middlesex and Lancashire, and had agreed to go; but as the time for the match drew near, the sad memories of bygone days became too much for him. The pathetic interest of a composition so reminiscent of the "long ago" will be understood by those who know what it is to miss their favourite faces from the field of sport. It may be mentioned in passing, that Thompson wrote a lengthy criticism of "The Jubilee Book of Cricket" in the *Academy*—a criticism, we are assured, full of Cricket acumen.

Whilst at Ushaw, Thompson wrote a number of verses, some of which are still in the possession of the college authorities, or of college companions. In more than one, the quaint spelling and love of the older words which marked his later works, are noticeable. It must be for others to say how far these early

efforts exhibit the buddings of that exuberant genius, which was afterwards to display itself so wonderfully. Five such poems, "Lamente forre Stephanon," "Song of the Neglected Poet," "Finchale," "Dirge of Douglas," "A Song of Homildon," are given in full in the *Ushaw Magazine* for March 1908. "The Song of the Neglected Poet," by its very title, cannot fail to excite interest among Thompson lovers. Its theme is the praise of poesy; the first three verses run:

Still, be still within my breast, thou ever, ever
wailing heart;
Hush, O hush within my bosom, beating,
beating heart of mine!
Lay aside thy useless grief, and brood not o'er thy
aching smart.
Wherefore but for sick hearts' healing, came
down poesy divine?

Mourn not, soul, o'er hopes departed, efforts spent,
and spent in vain;
On a glorious strife we entered, and 'twas for a
priceless stake;
Well 'twas foughten, well we've struggled, and,
tho' all our hopes are slain,

Yet, my soul, we have a treasure not the banded world can take.

Poesy, that glorious treasure! Poesy my own for e'er!
Mine and thine, my soul, for ever, ours though all else may be gone;
Like the sun it shone upon us when our life began so fair,
Like the moon it stays to cheer us now our night is almost done.

The "Dirge of Douglas" has a martial ring:

Let no ruthful burying song
Lament the Earl of Douglas,
But let his praises loud and long
Echo the rocks and hills among,
Poured from the lips of warriors strong,
The doughty Earl of Douglas!

* * * * *

Bear him to his grave with a warlike pace,
Sing no sad requiem o'er him;
The mightiest he of all his race,
He is gone, and none can fill his place!
Let the champion lie in his warrior's grace
Where his forefathers lay before him.

The "Song of Homildon" is a mere fragment:

Now every man from hill and plain
Follow the banner of Percy;
For into Northumberland, trampling o'er slain,
The doughty Earl Douglas hath forayed amain,
And scorneth all ruth or mercy.

Hotspur hath girded his harness on,
And plucked his sword from the scabbard;
He led his army to Homildon,
There, e'er the ruddy moon be done,
The lion must yield to the libbard.

Neither in arithmetic, nor later in mathematics, was the young poet a success. Indeed, at the end of his college career, he had fallen to the last place in mathematical subjects. But in the classics generally, and English and essay-writing in particular, he was often the first, both at seminary and college. On five only out of the twenty-one occasions in his seminary days when examinations in essay-writing were held, did he fail to secure the top place. From these early compositions it would appear that battles and sieges were the

favourite subjects in prose of the shy and gentle youth whose own battle of life was destined to be singularly severe and prolonged. One of his essays, "The Storming of the Bridge of Lodi," written for a speaker at the debating club in 1874 (the year Francis passed from seminary into college proper), evoked considerable enthusiasm among his companions. In Latin he was nearly as successful; in Greek he seldom, if ever, failed to pass with credit; and in French, taking the examinations all through, his successes were certainly well above the average of his fellow students.

The seven years spent by Thompson at Ushaw stamped his after-life deeply with its religious atmosphere. He was orthodox through and through, "from within, from beneath, outward to his acts, upward to his poetry." Those who would trace something of the genesis of the lines which have earned for him the title of "the Liturgiologist of English verse" must look to the influence of his Ushaw days for the clue to the fact that his verse is so often odorous of the sanctuary or reminiscent of the Church's ritual.[1] If,

[1] "Ritualism" Thompson defined as "poetry addressed to the eye."



FRANCIS THOMPSON AT THE AGE OF FIFTEEN

as has been said by one, his poetry is spiritual even to a fault, it must be a "fault" the glory, doubtless, of his Alma Mater!

Thompson left Ushaw in July 1877—a disappointment to himself and to his parents. All hopes of his entering the priesthood crushed by the unfavourable reports of the College authorities — reports which while praising the goodness of the youth, his docility of character, and his general ability, yet made it clear that his want of application in the subjects necessary and his "nervous timidity" were insuperable barriers—he returned to his home in Ashton-under-Lyne at the close of the school year 1876–7, and some months afterwards entered Owens College, Manchester, as a medical student—travelling daily by rail between the two towns. It was then that the clouds of his life began to gather. Thus much is known—that the subject of Medicine was entirely distasteful to him, and that, though he distinguished himself in Greek in a preliminary examination, he did not devote himself to the reading necessary for the profession which it was now intended he should follow: like Keats in *his* hospital-walking days, he was more engrossed by volumes of poetry than by

treatises on anatomy. The "Halls of Medicine" saw him but seldom: it was in the public libraries of Manchester, with his favourite authors, the poets, that he spent most of his days. His passion for Cricket led him often, at this time, to Old Trafford, among the great matches which he witnessed there being the historic meeting of Lancashire and Gloucestershire on July 25, 26, and 27, 1878.

Thompson spent nearly eight years at Owens College. Among those contemporary with him are many names of eminence: Professor W. Thorburn, Dr E. S. Reynolds, Dr Robert Maguire, Dr Leopold Larmuth, and the late Dr Thomas Harris, among the rest. But Thompson as a medical student was a misfit, for his hopes of healing lay elsewhere than in the consulting-room, as his "Song of the Neglected Poet," already quoted, shows.

The graceful memorial affixed (July 1912) in Manchester University to Thompson's memory as a student at Owens College bears some sad lines (taken from his "Ode to the Setting Sun"), which may serve to indicate the sense of disappointment haunting his life at the period of closing his medical studies:

Whatso looks lovelily
Is but the rainbow on life's weeping rain.
Why have we longings of immortal pain,
And all we long for mortal? Woe is me,
And all our chants but chaplet some decay
As mine this vanishing—nay, vanished Day.

Afraid to declare to his father that his heart was set on literature—on the construction of sentences rather than that of the human body—he does not seem to have made any very elaborate attempts to deliberately deceive his parents, but to have relied on silence and evasion and to have pursued the thorny "path of dalliance" until his non-success at the examinations brought matters to a climax. Dr Thompson, not being blessed (or otherwise) with worldly wealth, it was necessary that his son should earn his own living. To quote from an article by His Grace the Archbishop of Simla (a friend, later, of Thompson, *fils*) in the "Franciscan Annals":—"The Army" at this juncture "was thought of as a possible solution of the difficulty. But it was only a transitory mirage in the now arid desert of the future poet's prospects. Attempts in diverse directions were made to put this wayward

youth to some practical method of earning a livelihood. It was all in vain. More in sorrow than in anger his father left him to his own devices, and the young man, as much a mystery to himself as his disappointed parents, left the North of England and found his way to London." It was in the November of 1885, after a "scene" with his father, and after having tried, in vain, to enlist, that Francis abruptly left home: he seems to have dallied a few days in Manchester, living on the proceeds realised by the sale of his personal belongings, and then to have proceeded to the Metropolis, soon to become *his* City of Dreadful Night, with little more in his pockets than two beloved volumes—one of Blake, the other of Aeschylus. In the words of one destined to be remembered down the annals of time as the "Father, Brother, Friend" of our prodigal poet: "Like De Quincey he went to London, and knew Oxford Street for a stony-hearted stepmother."[1] Like Shakespeare in *his* early London days it was only by accepting "mean employment" that Thompson was able to keep his soul in his body.

[1] Mr Meynell, quoting from De Quincey's "Confessions," "So then, Oxford Street, stony-hearted stepmother," etc.

With no fixed plans before him, with no trade or profession in his fingers—a dreamer and nothing more—it is not surprising that penury, with its attendant miseries, became his lot. Money was sent from home, but after a while he either failed to receive or refused to accept it; was lost sight of by his family, and gradually sank to a life of vagrancy. Opium-taking, learnt whilst a student of medicine, from the pages of De Quincey, though banishing the pangs of hunger for a while, only added to his difficulties. Now and again he obtained "regular" employment of a kind, but in none was he a success. He worked for a while as a "collector" for a bookseller for whom he had to haul heavy sacks of books through the streets. Later, he was employed as assistant in a boot-shop in Panton Street. "Are you saved?" he had been asked one day in the street by a man pitying his obvious plight. "What right have you to ask?" returned the poor youth. The questioner, persisting in his good intentions, answered quietly, "Well, if you won't let me save your soul, let me save your body. If you want work, come to me." And so the young poet became a handy boy in a boot-shop! But days there were when no

employment of *any* kind could be had, and the homeless night followed perforce the hungry day. Those who see in Thompson's poem, "The Hound of Heaven," a narration of his own experiences, will find many a passage which may have been suggested by this period:

In the rash lustihead of my young powers,
I shook the pillaring hours
And pulled my life upon me; grimed with smears,
I stand amid the dust o' the mounded years—
My mangled youth lies dead beneath the heap.
My days have crackled and gone up in smoke,
Have puffed and burst as sun-starts on a stream.

* * * * *

Ah! must—
Designer Infinite!—
Ah! must Thou char the wood ere Thou canst limn with it?

* * * * *

In vain my tears were wet on Heaven's grey cheek.

* * * * *

Lines such as these tell their own story of the years "with heavy griefs so overplussed"

Thompson was never physically strong. He had been afflicted with a nervous breakdown before leaving Manchester, from the effects of which he never wholly recovered. His life in London, before his "rescue" in 1888, cut off from home, and without a friend, must have been terrible. At times utterly destitute, at others glad to earn a trifling sum by any odd job (selling matches, "blacking" boots, and the like) that chance threw in his way, his home perchance a railway arch or bench in the Park—oppressed, too, by the sense of his many failures—failure for the priesthood; failure in medicine; failure to keep even his "mean employments"—and, "unkindest cut of all," by the thoughts of filial duty unfulfilled, it is no wonder that he should have sought the attraction of laudanum to bring some measure of oblivion or relief. Doubtless it was the lamp of Faith burning through even the darkest hours of his dark night of the soul which alone saved the homeless wanderer from the greater darkness of Despair so often associated with the suicide's fate. It is related that on one occasion in his darkest days he was so strongly tempted to self-destruction that he only escaped the tempter by some mysterious,

unseen intervention, and that the heaven of which he writes :

Short arm needs man to reach to heaven,
So ready is heaven to stoop to him ;

did indeed stoop to save him, by dashing away the poison he had intended, in a fit of desperation, to take.

There is a touching incident (again recalling De Quincey) recorded in his own matchless way in his volume of " Sister Songs " (A Child's Kiss) which occurred in this " nightmare " time :

Once, bright Sylviola ! in days not far,
Once—in that nightmare-time which still doth haunt
My dreams, a grim, unbidden visitant—
Forlorn, and faint, and stark,
I had endured through watches of the dark
The abashless inquisition of each star,
Yea, was the outcast mark
Of all those heavenly passers' scrutiny ;
Stood bound and helplessly
For Time to shoot his barbèd minutes at me ;
Suffered the trampling hoof of every hour
In night's slow-wheelèd car :

Until the tardy dawn dragged me at length
From under those dread wheels; and, bled of strength,
I waited the inevitable last.
Then there came past
A child; like thee, a spring flower; but a flower
Fallen from the budded coronal of Spring,
And through the city streets blown withering.
She passed,—O brave, sad, lovingest, tender thing!—
And of her own scant pittance did she give,
That I might eat and live:
Then fled, a swift and trackless fugitive.

* * * * *

The magazine to which Thompson sent his first accepted piece was *Merry England*. It has been stated that Thompson heard of the existence of this magazine through the late Bishop (then Canon) Carroll, who, meeting him in London, had determined to do what he could to help him in his work, and had written to tell him of the possibilities which the magazine offered. For a couple of years the poor poet had been sending verses, written on scraps of paper picked up in the streets, to impatient editors—but without result. To the magazine mentioned (now defunct) he

sent, in February 1887, in hopelessly unpresentable manuscript, a prose article, and also a poem ("The Passion of Mary"), which latter, by its acceptance and the consequential results, became the turning-point in the poet's career. The tender-hearted editor, Mr Wilfrid Meynell, (himself a poet of considerable ability),[1] not content with publishing the verses, determined to find and assist their author. The address—"Post Office, Charing Cross"—given on the manuscript afforded but little clue however, and the search for the vagrant poet, then in the most pitiable state after twelve months and more of appalling misery, was a long one. By singular ill-luck there had been delay in inserting the verses—pigeon-holed for a time—and a letter sent to Thompson, asking him to call on the Editor, had been returned through the dead-letter office. Finally, however, in May 1888, the derelict poet was traced through the chemist in Drury Lane from whom he procured the drug to ease his "human smart,"—to be rescued, at a time when, broken in health and "more ragged and unkempt than the average beggar, with no

[1] "Verses and Re-verses" is now perhaps the best known of Mr Meynell's poetry.

shirt beneath his coat and bare feet in broken shoes," [1] the end seemed almost in sight.

Won over at length by the tender sympathy, a sympathy too tactful for the shyest of mortals to have withstood, of Mr Meynell and of his wife, Alice Meynell,[2] (then as now the acknowledged Queen of English verse,) he agreed to place himself under their care. He was received temporarily into their home, and made the friend of their children. Canon Carroll (afterwards Bishop of Shrewsbury), who had, years before, made efforts on behalf of the poet's family to trace the missing youth in the crowd of London's submerged tenth, now became the intermediary between Francis and his father, and had the happiness of finding his efforts to bring about a reconciliation successful. By his manly tenderness in doing all that was possible to heal the scars of the wanderer, the Canon so won the poet's heart that (as told by one who knew both poet and prelate intimately) the attitude of the one to the other was thenceforth that of "a little child at his father's knee." After being medically treated and carefully nursed,

[1] Mr Everard Meynell's "Life of Francis Thompson."

[2] Mrs Meynell died on the 27th November 1922.

Thompson lived for nearly two years in the Premonstratensian Monastery at Storrington, in Sussex. The lines in "Sister Songs":

Stretched on the margin of the cruel sea
Whence they had rescued me,
With faint and painful pulses was I lying;
Not yet discerning well
If I had 'scaped, or were an icicle,
Whose thawing is its dying.
Like one who sweats before a despot's gate,
Summoned by some presaging scroll of fate,
And knows not whether kiss or dagger wait;
And all so sickened is his countenance,
The courtiers buzz, "Lo, doomed!" and look at him askance:—
At Fate's dread portal then
Even so stood I, I ken,
Even so stood I, between a joy and fear,
And said to mine own heart, "Now if the end be here!"

refer, doubtless, to the time spent in the hospital where he was placed soon after his rescue from the streets, and during which he seems to have been doubtful of his own recovery.

It is not strange that the children of the Meynell family became the subject of some of Thompson's finest verses. To their mother, Mrs Meynell,[1] he dedicated the group of poems, "Love in Dian's Lap," besides many other charming pieces. To Mr Meynell himself, under the initials "W. M.," he addressed the touching lines:

O tree of many branches! One thou hast
Thou barest not, but grafted'st on thee. Now,
Should all men's thunders break on thee, and leave
Thee reft of bough and blossom, that one branch
Shall cling to thee, my Father, Brother, Friend,
Shall cling to thee, until the end of end.

Of Storrington, Mr Meynell, in his biographical note prefaced to the volume of "Selected Poems," writes: "That beautiful Sussex village has now its fixed place on the map of English literature. For there it was that Francis Thompson discovered his possibilities as a poet." From thenceforth (Novem-

[1] An interesting estimate and review of the poetry of Mrs Meynell, with special reference to the poetry of Francis Thompson, appeared in the *British Review* of March 1913.

ber 1888) until about 1897, when he took mainly to the writing of prose, the young eagle of poetry soared higher and higher in his poetic flights, to attain at last a sublimity unsurpassed by any other Victorian singer. If his works are not yet as widely known as certain lesser writers', it is partly because Francis Thompson is the poets' poet, and partly because, as an article in the *Ushaw Magazine* puts it, verses such as his, by their deep symbolism and old-time words, "are by their very character slow-footed travellers. They will journey far, but they must have time."

The first volume of Thompson's Poems, which appeared in November 1893, under the simple title, "Poems,"[1] attracted attention immediately. Referring to the section "Love in Dian's Lap," Canon Yates writes: "Was woman ever more exquisitely sung? I do not know in the whole realm of English poetry a more noble tribute to noble womanhood." Of one of the longer pieces, "The Hound of Heaven," in another section, the critics did not hesitate to say that it seemed to be, on the whole, the most wonderful lyric in the language, the author a Crashaw cast in a diviner mould—

[1] Dedicated to Mr and Mrs Meynell.

a worthy disciple of Dante—a companion of Cowley—the equal of Shelley. A foremost critic [1] summed it up as "the return of the nineteenth century to Thomas à Kempis." It delighted men of such diverse minds as Sir Edward Burne-Jones and Mr Coventry Patmore, the Bishop of London, the Rev. R. J. Campbell, and Father Bernard Vaughan. Grave and learned priests quoted it in their sermons; scholars and literary men in every walk of life learnt it by heart; the *Times* emphatically declared that men will still be learning it 200 years hence! Considered by most authorities to be Thompson's masterpiece, "The Hound of Heaven" abounds in gems of artistic trope and poetic imagery. It is doubtful if any more impressively beautiful gallery of pictures, contained in the space of less than two hundred lines, has been seen in modern verse. The subject-matter—God's pursuit and conquest of the resisting soul that would find its satisfaction elsewhere than in Him (God being symbolized as the Hound)—is described, to borrow the words of Patmore, "in a torrent of as humanly-expressive verse as was ever inspired by a natural affection."

[1] J. L. Garvin.

Of the poems in the first volume it will suffice to quote Mr J. L. Garvin in *The Bookman*:

"A volume of poetry has not appeared in Queen Victoria's reign more authentic in greatness of utterance than this. . . . It is perfectly safe to affirm that if Mr Thompson wrote no other line, by this volume alone he is as secure of remembrance as any poet of the century. . . . Mr Thompson's first volume is no mere promise—it is itself among the great achievements of English poetry; it has reached the peak of Parnassus at a bound."

The second volume entitled "Sister Songs," dedicated to Monica and Madeline Meynell (daughters of Mr and Mrs Meynell), though written in 1891, was not published until 1895. It is the most autobiographical of Thompson's volumes. Included in it is a poem (the "Poet and Anchorite" of "Selected Poems") which contains some lines memorable by their special insight into the poet's inner self:

Love and love's beauty only hold their revels
In life's familiar, penetrable levels:
What of its ocean-floor?
I dwell there evermore.

From almost earliest youth
I raised the lids o' the truth,
And forced her bend on me her shrinking sight—

It was from stern truth, then, that the Prodigal of Song learned his Art!

"Sister Songs" is described by Mr Archer as "a book which Shelley would have adored." Professor Dowden wrote of it: "Every page is wealthy in beauties of detail, *beauties of a kind which are at the command of no living poet, other than Mr Thompson.*" The *Times* says it contains passages which Spenser would not have disowned. To quote the latter more fully: "Thompson used his large vocabulary with a boldness—and especially a recklessness, almost a frivolity in rhyme—that were worthy of Browning. On the other hand, these rugged points were, at a further view, absorbed into the total effect of beauty in a manner which Browning never achieved. . . . These 'Sister Songs,' written in praise of two little sisters, contain a number of lovely and most musical lines, and some passages—such as the seventh section of the first poem—which Spenser would not have disowned." The *New Age* summed up its estimate: "We

have not in the English tongue a volume more entirely packed with unalloyed poetry."

The last volume of verse (1897) entitled "New Poems" [1] bears the same high mark of genius, and won (with rare exceptions) the highest praise from the critics and reviewers. *The Speaker* declared: "Here are dominion—dominion over language, and a sincerity as of Robert Burns. . . . Mr Thompson's poetry at its highest attains a sublimity unsurpassed by any English poet." Sir A. T. Quiller-Couch ("Q") sums up his estimate of one of the poems in this volume, "The Mistress of Vision": "It is verily a wonderful poem; hung, like a fairy-tale, in middle air—a sleeping palace of beauty set in a glade in the heart of the woods of Westermain, surprised there and recognized with a gasp as satisfying, and summarizing a thousand youthful longings after beauty."

Maud Diver in her novel "Candles in the Wind" has many fine things to say of Thompson's third book. One passage only (given here purposely without reference to the particular character to which it refers) will be sufficient to show something of the novelist's appreciation:

[1] Dedicated to Coventry Patmore.

During the process [of reading "New Poems"] *murmurs of admiration broke from him. He was poet enough to recognize in this new singer a star of the first magnitude; and there, while the pageant in the west flamed and died, he read that regal "Ode to the Setting Sun," which is, in itself, a pageant of colour and sound; a deathless vindication of Death's fruition. Then, eager for more, he passed on to "The Anthem of Earth," surrendering his soul to the onrush of its majestical cadences; reading and re-reading, with an exalted thrill, certain lines, doubly pencilled, that echoed in his brain for days.*

* * * * *

At the end of an hour he sat there still—in a changed world; a world no less stern and silent, yet mysteriously softened and spiritualized as if by the brush of a consummate artist.

To the poems in this volume, more than the rest, Thompson owes his title of a Mystic. It is in "New Poems" that he gives himself over to those oscillations of ecstasy and sadness—the "fever of love" and the reactions of spiritual desolation—those divine invasions and abandonments—which pave the mystic's way. Climbing the "summits of contemplation,"

he there propounds the stark gospel of renunciation and gives us those visions of the Beauty Ineffable more or less common to all "illuminated men," and which from the intensity of his soul-intoxication we feel to have been the revelation of his own personal experience. Included in the group "Sight and Insight" are to be found the verses which exhibit his mysticism at its highest: it is hardly too much to say that most of the pieces "The Mistress of Vision," "The Dread of Height," "Orient Ode," "From the Night of Forebeing," "Any Saint," "Assumpta Maria," and "Grace of the Way"—all full of lofty grandeur combined with rapturous fervour and spiritual profundity—will appear in every anthology of mystical poetry, worthy of the name, for centuries to come.

"The Selected Poems of Francis Thompson," with the biographical note by Mr Meynell before referred to and a portrait of the poet in his nineteenth year, was issued in 1908. The selection, about fifty pieces in all, gives us of Thompson's best. The poems on children rightly take the first place; of the one, addressed to the Divine Child, entitled "Ex Ore Infantium" (a Christmastide hymn

which appeared originally in *Franciscan Annals*), it is but sober truth to say that nothing so daringly familiar, and yet so tenderly devotional, has been put into language of such simple power by any English poet since Crashaw. The volume contains several of the greater poems in full, including "The Hound of Heaven," the "Ode to the Setting Sun," the "Orient Ode," and "Any Saint" (a partly direct, partly mystical poem, of special significance); extracts from the "Mistress of Vision," the "Victorian Ode" (written for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee), "The Anthem of Earth," "Assumpta Maria," and others of the longer works; the whole of "Daisy," "July Fugitive," "Dream Tryst," "Contemplation," and other poems, besides a number of simpler pieces—the Violets of Thompson's Garden of Poesy. The selection includes also the lines "The Kingdom of God" ("In no Strange Land") found among the poet's papers after his death, which are remarkable for their striking epitome of his teaching and final message. The patriotic "Victorian Ode," to be found in full in "New Poems" and written for one of the great dailies (the *Daily Chronicle*, if one mistakes not), was con-

sidered by many to be the best of the Diamond Jubilee Odes. Another and perhaps more famous ode is the one on Cecil Rhodes [1] which Thompson wrote for the *Academy*, at the special request of the editor, Mr Lewis Hind, and produced in less than three days—an example of rapidity in "unpremeditated art" that must surely be unique. Mr Hind said of it: "I am prouder of having published that ode than anything else that the *Academy* ever contained." Before the poem was a few weeks old, it was quoted on every side: one passage in particular struck the public fancy:

From the Zambesi to the Limpopo
He the many-languaged land
Took with his large compacting hand
And pressed into a nation——

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An ode for the centenary of Ushaw College, in 1908, had been promised by Thompson, but he did not live to do more than sketch a few rough notes of the form he had intended it should take.

[1] Included in the "definitive" edition of Thompson's works issued in 1913.

Francis Thompson is not a poet with whom the multitudes of the reading public are as yet familiar, though the circle of his admirers is ever increasing. He ranks, nevertheless, as one of the few really great poetic geniuses and writers of his century, though his position cannot be definitely assigned until the world has had time to take more careful stock of his treasures, and had leisure to consider the full store of his literary output in verse and prose. For Thompson was not only a poet, but in his later years a writer of prose as sonorous and wellnigh as remarkable as his poems. An unexpected estimate of the value of prose as an aid to poetry is given in one of Thompson's footnotes to his "Essay on Shelley":—"According to our theory, the practice of prose should maintain fresh and comprehensive a poet's diction, should save him from falling into the hands of an exclusive coterie of poetic words. It should react upon his metrical vocabulary to its beneficial expansion by taking him outside his aristocratic circle of language. For it is with words as with men: constant intermarriage within the limits of a patrician clan begets effete refinement; and to reinvigorate the stock, its veins must be

replenished from hardy plebeian blood." Genius, like nature, would appear to abhor a vacuum; in our poet's case the years following 1897 may be described as his post-poetic period, a period which produced his great prose works and the many valuable reviews of works on Poetry, Theology, History, and Biography which he contributed to the leading periodicals, and which have since been recovered, as was inevitable, from their files. The prose works which have been published separately up to the present are his "Health and Holiness; or, A Study of the Relations between Brother Ass, the Body, and his Rider, the Soul" (an admirable scholastic essay, in heroic prose), and his works on Shelley, on St Ignatius of Loyola, and St John Baptist de la Salle. The "Essay on Shelley" was pronounced by a leading authority[1] to be "the most important contribution to pure letters written in English during the last twenty years." This now world-famous essay is not the longest, but it is undoubtedly the most brilliant of Thompson's

[1] The Right Hon. George Wyndham. Mr Somervell, in his "Companion to Palgrave's Golden Treasury," has since described "The Essay on Shelley" as "the most eloquent piece of literary criticism in the English language."

prose works, as it was the most exhausting of his efforts. Its history is remarkable. Written, we are told, at the request of Bishop (afterwards Cardinal) Vaughan for the *Dublin Review*, which the Bishop owned but did not edit, it was refused acceptance by the editor, to be thereupon thrown aside by the discouraged author. Mr Meynell, Thompson's literary executor, found it among the poet's papers at his death nineteen years later, and thinking it right that the Review for which it was originally intended should still have the offer of it, since a new generation of readers and another editor had arisen, again sent it up to the *Dublin Review*—this time to be accepted. "Thus" (to quote Mr Meynell himself) "it happened that this orphan among essays entered at last on a full inheritance of fame. Appreciative readers rapidly spread its renown beyond their own orthodox ranks; and, for the first time in a long life of seventy-two years, the *Dublin Review* passed into a second edition. That also was soon exhausted, but not the further demand, which the separate issue is designed to meet." For "The Life of St Ignatius of Loyola," which, with the "Essay on Shelley," must ever remain the

chief memorials to his power as a prose-writer, original research was, of course, impossible, but, as stated in Fr. Pollen's editorial note, the author brought to his work the sympathy of genius with genius, and had almost a contemporary's affinity with the age in which the Saint lived. The Rev. Dr Barry, himself a distinguished writer, says of it: "It is a portrait from life, not a copy. . . . While we read these lines the founder of the great Company stands before us in his habit as he lived." And again: "I hold that our dead poet has written a Life exact in statement, beautiful in point of style. . . . It is a notable addition, if we ought not rather to call it the beginning of a true English literature, in its own department." In an interesting passage in the Life, the Saint is compared with John Wesley, whose lives, though so unlike outwardly, had much of similarity below the surface.

"The Life of St John Baptist de la Salle," a shorter work, presents the life of the Founder of the Christian Brothers with singular felicity, and contains in the closing chapter a brilliant epigrammatic defence of the Church's championship of free education. The three

volumes, "The Works of Francis Thompson," issued to the public in 1913, contain in Vols. I. and II.[1] practically the whole of Thompson's poetry—the whole so far as it has come to the knowledge of his literary executor and been considered worthy of preservation—and in Vol. III. many of his literary criticisms, articles, and reviews, as well as the essays on "Shelley" and "Health and Holiness" already referred to. The two first volumes have been arranged according to Thompson's express instructions, and now form the "definitive" edition of his poetical works.

* * * * *

A seventeenth-century poet, born in the nineteenth, bringing with him the solace of old-time melody—melody like unto the richest strains of Crashaw and Cowley — Francis Thompson depends mainly on his poetical works for his place among the literary giants of his age. His poems are among the glories of our literature. They have fashioned for themselves thrones in the hearts of many to whom the charms of verse had seldom appealed before: their deep faith in the intimate presence of

[1] Vol. II. contains the more mystical poems which appeared originally in *New Poems* under the sub-title *Sight and Insight.*

God has been an inspiration and spiritual tonic to innumerable souls. Thousands of readers have drawn encouragement and hope, not only from "The Hound of Heaven," but from many another of Francis Thompson's poems. Never, surely, was woman worshipped with such utter chastity. "Where," asks Mr Traill in *The Nineteenth Century*, "unless perhaps here and there in a sonnet of Rossetti's, has this sort of sublimated enthusiasm for the bodily and spiritual beauty of womanhood found such expression between the age of the Stuarts and our own?"

Thompson is above all the poet of celestial vision. His poetry answers to the full Shelley's description of the function of poetry in general; it "redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man," and that, too, in a far higher sense than Shelley had in mind. In no other great poet of the nineteenth century are these visitations more frequent or more splendid. The conception of God as a Being "coldly sublime" or "insufferably just" was entirely and instinctively repugnant to Thompson's thought. Monsieur K. Rooker[1]—in his

[1] "Francis Thompson," by K. Rooker, Doctor of Paris University, 1913.

notable French work on Francis Thompson, states: "He (Thompson) is quite convinced of the intimate union of his soul with the Living God . . . his belief has nothing in common with the vague pantheism of the Victorian era: we never find in him the uneasy agnosticism of Matthew Arnold or the ample [1] beliefs of Robert Browning. In his poetry it is not the human soul which gropes among shadows in search of his God, but God who pursues the wandering soul of the poet."

Thompson's own invocation—

> . . . *Thy wings incline,*
> *Ah, my Angel, o'er the line—*

prefixed to the volume of his prose before referred to,[2] might stand for every line of his work. The description of the "house of dreams" in his "Dream Tryst"—

> *The chambers of the house of dreams*
> *Are fed with so* divine *an air*
> *That Time's hoar wings grow young therein*
> *And they who walk there are most fair—*

might well be applied to his own house of

[1] "Croyances *larges* de Robert Browning."

[2] Vol. III. of the "definitive" edition issued in 1913.

dreams—the dreams, heaven-hued—of which his verses are filled.

The lines of Blake—

If the sun and moon should doubt
They'd immediately go out—

must have won Thompson's fullest acceptance and unstinted admiration. To his eyes the world was literally crammed with the

"*Many-coloured wisdom of God*"

and Christ he saw—

"*Lo here! Lo there!—ah me, lo everywhere!*"

Almost the last lines he ever penned bear the same testimony—

Yea, in the night, my Soul, my daughter,
Cry,—clinging Heaven by the hems;
And lo, Christ walking on the water,
Not of Gennesareth, but Thames!

The intensity of his mysticism—the glow and fervour of his verse—his rapturous communings, seem to have "fired" the very critics. The extracts appended, taken more or less at random from a number of their appreciations, will

serve to indicate the unprecedented enthusiasm which the poet's lines exercised:

One has seldom seen poet more wildly abandoned to his rapture, more absorbed in the trance of his ecstasy. When the irresistible moment comes, he throws himself upon his mood as a glad swimmer gives himself to the waves, careless whither the strong tide carries him, knowing only the wild joy of the laughing waters and the rainbow spray. He shouts, as it were, for mere gladness, in the welter of wonderful words, and he dives swift and fearless to fetch his deep-sea fancies.—R. LE GALLIENNE, in *The Daily Chronicle.*

Never since Milton, surely, has verse worn so regal a vesture. . . . Born of a soul that had the stars for its food, wrought in a mind as stainless as it was sincere, Thompson's work speaks to men of the things that belong to their peace in a voice that strikes a new chord in English literature.—*Everyman.*

To read Mr Francis Thompson's poems is like setting sail with Drake or Hawkins in search of new worlds and golden spoils. He has the magnificent Elizabethan manner, the splendour of conception, the largeness of imagery.—KATHARINE TYNAN-HINKSON, in *The Bookman.*

He swung a rare incense in a censer of gold, under the vault of a chapel where he had hung votive offerings. When he chanted in his chapel of dreams, the airs were often airs which he had learnt from Crashaw and from Patmore. They came to life again when he used them, and he made for himself a music which was part strangely familiar and part his own, almost bewilderingly. Such reed-notes and such orchestration of sound were heard nowhere else; and people listened to the music, entranced as by a new magic. The genius of Francis Thompson was Oriental, exuberant in colour, woven into elaborate patterns, and went draped in old silk robes, that had survived many dynasties. The spectacle of him was an enchantment; he passed like a wild vagabond of the mind, dazzling our sight.—ARTHUR SYMONS, in *The Saturday Review.*

In Francis Thompson's poetry, as in the poetry of the universe, you can work infinitely out and out, but yet infinitely in and in. These two infinities are the mark of greatness; and he was a great poet.—G. K. CHESTERTON, in *The Illustrated London News.*

We find that in these poems profound thought, far-fetched splendour of imagery, and nimble-witted discernment of those analogies which are

the roots of the poet's language, abound . . . qualities which ought to place him in the permanent ranks of fame, with Cowley and with Crashaw.—COVENTRY PATMORE, in *The Fortnightly Review.*

The regal airs, the prophetic ardours, the apocalyptic vision, the supreme utterance—he has them all.—The Bookman.

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Thompson stayed for some months in 1892 near to the Franciscan Monastery at Pantasaph in North Wales, and returned to London the same year, but was back again at Pantasaph in 1893, during the period when the reviews, mostly full of superlative praise, of his first volume of poems began to appear. The applause of the world he took as a child would. "He opened his eyes, smiled a happy smile, and went on his way forgetting all about it." Whatever the cause, Thompson, after some happy years spent among the solitude of the Welsh hills, removed back again to London in 1896; there he spent practically the rest of his days. He did not, while at Pantasaph, live *at* the monastery (as has been stated elsewhere), but spent a good deal of time within its walls. His relations with the Friars were

always cordial. Fr. Anselm, then the editor of *Franciscan Annals*, and now Archbishop of Simla, became the poet's close friend. Except for a few days which he may have spent at the monastery pending suitable lodgings being found outside, Thompson lived in hired apartments in the little Welsh village, first with a family of working people, and later at the Post Office. Here, and in the monastic grounds—away from "the madding crowd" —he wrote some of his best work, including, from materials partly gathered in London and partly in the monastery library, a considerable portion of the lengthy life of St Ignatius of Loyola, published after his death. Much of his verse is richly stained with the local colouring of the neighbourhood, and without doubt much of the exalted mystical thought which characterizes "New Poems" must have sprung from the religious atmosphere of Pantasaph, coupled with the poet's familiar intercourse with the Friars, and his visits to the neighbouring shrine at Holywell. The Welsh peasants of the district became, in time, quite accustomed to the poet's strange figure as he flitted ghostlike (as was his habit) among their mountain homesteads in the shades of the

gathering night. With the Sons of the Little Poor Man of Assissi, whether at Crawley, another favourite home of the poet, or at Pantasaph, he seems to have been thoroughly happy. He enriched the *Franciscan Annals* with the altogether exquisite lines "Ex Ore Infantium," already mentioned, and a noble poem, "Franciscus Christificatus"—besides many prose articles, in one of which he anticipated much of the powerful plea for greater leniency to Brother Ass, the body, that he afterwards made in "Health and Holiness." An article on Thompson which appeared in *Franciscan Annals* shortly after his death mentions his charmingly simple character: "He was of a surety one of the most interesting, and one of the most charmingly simple, and—we must add in these days of doubt—one of the most intensely and instinctively orthodox, members of our little flock."

An interesting event in connection with our poet's stay in North Wales was a visit paid to him there, in 1894, by Coventry Patmore, his "Captain of Song," to whom the last of his volumes of Poetry ("New Poems") is dedicated. Shy and reserved at

first, Thompson gradually thawed under the warmth of the older poet's genuine regard, and many details of their meetings, conversation and subsequent correspondence are given by Thompson's biographer, Mr Everard Meynell, in the official Life. The brother poets frequently visited the monastery together, and called, on more than one occasion, at the neighbouring Jesuit College of St Beuno.

About 1898 Thompson became attached to the staff of the *Academy* in London, and to that journal, and later to the *Athenæum*, contributed many noteworthy articles and reviews. One of his colleagues on the *Academy* states that it was quite a usual thing when reading over the proof of an article by Thompson "to exclaim aloud on his splendid handling of a subject demanding the best literary knowledge and insight." Another has shown how Thompson exercised the privilege, peculiar to the poet, of disregarding the ordinary rules of method and order pertaining to a business office. He was (we are told) the most unbusinesslike creature, and often drove the editor to despair. His "copy" (always written on pages torn from penny exercise books) came pretty regularly, but it was

almost impossible to get him to return proofs. Neither imploring letters nor peremptory telegrams availed. Then he would walk in, calmly produce from his basket or wonderful pockets a mass of galleys, and amongst them, as likely as not, two or three telegrams unopened. But (to quote Mr Meynell once more) "editors forbore to be angry at his delays, for after a while of waiting, they got from him, at last, what none else could give at all." It would be an utterly false conception of the poet to imagine that his life was spent in idleness. His true vocation attained, his prodigious output—that cathedral of stately thought for which his name now stands—completely redeemed the "indolence" (if the term can be applied to the period of mental preparation, with its aloofness from his fellows,) of his former years. That "The Hound of Heaven" and "Sister Songs" (with other verse) were written in the same year (1891) must be reckoned among the wonders of modern literature, on account not only of the vastness of the task involved, but of the essential difference of the two works, combined with the prodigality of their grandeurs. Probably no parallel achievement can be found since

that of Shelley in 1819, when "Prometheus Unbound" and "The Cenci" were composed. Merely to glance through the three large volumes of Thompson's verse and prose, (not to mention his other works,) is to realize at once that "To scorn delights and live laborious days" must have been his lot. He lived every line of his poems—and the wonder is that with a body so weak, his brain should have been so incessantly active. Day and night, indoors or out, he was at work. In "Health and Holiness" the passage beginning: "This truth is written large over the records of saintliness, the energy of the saints has left everywhere its dents upon the world:" and in one of his poems ("Contemplation") the lines:

From stones and poets you may know
Nothing so active is, as that which least seems so—

are examples, among many, which go to give a sidelight view of his own ideas on the value of "pauseless energy."

Strange as it may seem in one so physically weak, his boyhood interest in matters military remained with him to the end. Mr Hind soon saw the poet's fondness for campaigns,

and tells how he made the most of it: "I discovered that his interest in battles, and the strategy of great commanders, was as keen as his concern with Cricket. So his satchel was filled with military memoirs, and retired generals, ensconced in the arm-chairs of service clubs, wondered. Here was a man who manipulated words as they manipulated men."

A pen-picture of Thompson at the time that he was on the *Academy* staff, furnished by an intimate associate, thus depicts him:

A stranger figure than Thompson's was not to be seen in London. Gentle in looks, half-wild in externals, his face worn by pain and the fierce reactions of laudanum, his hair and straggling beard neglected, he had yet a distinction and an aloofness of bearing that marked him in the crowd; and when he opened his lips, he spoke as a gentleman and a scholar. A cleaner mind, a more naïvely courteous manner, were not to be found. It was impossible and unnecessary to think always of the tragic side of his life. He still had to live and work in his fashion, and his entries and exits became our most cheerful institutions.

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No money (and in his later years Thompson suffered more from the possession of money than

from the lack of it) could keep him in a decent suit of clothes for long. Yet he was never "seedy." From a newness too dazzling to last, and seldom achieved at that, he passed at once into a picturesque nondescript garb that was all his own and made him resemble some weird pedlar or packman in an etching by Ostade. This impression of him was helped by the strange object—his fish basket, we called it—which he wore slung round his shoulders by a strap.

* * * * *

Thompson cared nothing for the world's comment, and though he would talk with radiant interest on many things, it was always with a certain sunny separateness, as though he issued out of unseen chambers of thought, requiring nothing, but able and willing to interest himself in the thing to which his attention was drawn. He had ceased to make demands on life. He ear-marked nothing for his own. As a reviewer, enjoying the run of the office, he never pounced on a book; he waited, and he accepted. Interested still in life, he was no longer intrigued by it. He was free from both apathy and desire. Unembittered by the destitution and despair he had known, unestranged from men by his passionate communings with the mysteries of faith and

beatific vision, Thompson kept his sweetness and sanity, his dewy laughter, and his fluttering gratitude. In such a man, outward ruin could never be pitiable or ridiculous, and, indeed, he never bowed his noble head but in adoration. I think the secret of his strength was this: that he had cast up his accounts with God and man, and thereafter stood in the mud of earth with a heart wrapped in such fire as touched Isaiah's lips. He was humbly, daringly, irrevocably satisfied of his soul.

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I cannot follow, far less expound, the faith which Thompson held so humbly, and embellished so royally. But I am very certain that if these things are so, and if God loves that man who for a wage of tears refines fine gold for His Ark, and with bleeding hands digs the rock for its adorning, then indeed the morass is become firm ground, and my old friend sees, through some thinner veil, "the immutable crocean dawn effusing from the Father's Throne." [1]

Another picture of the poet, this time as he appears to an Eastern mind, is to be found in

[1] Wilfred Whitten ("John o' London") in *T. P.'s Weekly*, November 29, 1907. The line "the immutable crocean dawn," etc., is from Thompson's poem, "A Judgment in Heaven."

S. K. Ghosh's Indian romance, "The Prince of Destiny." In this dramatic semi-political story "the presentment of India by an Indian," Francis Thompson is introduced as one of the characters, with many an interesting glimpse of his personality. "He was of medium height, but very slight of frame, which made him look taller than he really was. His cheeks were so sunken as to give undue prominence to a little grey beard that was pointed at the end, but otherwise untrimmed." Barath (the Prince-hero of the tale) meets Thompson at Waterloo Station, both, as it happens, though unknown to each other, bound for Boscombe. Barath notices his eyes, "in fact, struck by them from the first, he had noticed nothing else. Whether they were light grey or blue he could not tell; it was their lustre, not their colour, that arrested his attention. As for his garb, Barath cared little. . . . But the lustre of those eyes, intensified by the contrast of the sunken cheeks and emaciated face, he had never seen in England before." Barath is going to visit a friend, Colonel Wingate. Arrived at the house, he noticed that the Colonel was wrapt in thought, ever and anon casting an anxious glance down the gravel

path which ran past the house in a line with the main road beyond.

"Yes, we are expecting a friend," Wingate explains. "Rather, one, the privilege of whose friendship we hope to deserve some day. . . . I am here to-day and gone to-morrow, but this man's work will last as long as the English language lasts—which itself will survive the wreck of the British Empire."

Needless to say the expected guest is Francis Thompson, described later in the book as "this man whose intellect was perhaps the greatest among Englishmen of his day." A delightful glimpse is given of Thompson as a smoker. He takes out his pipe, strikes a match, gives a puff, holds the match over the bowl till his fingers are nearly burnt, then throws away the match, and strikes another—and so on. Wingate afterwards picks up the matches and counts them. "Just fourteen!" he says gleefully. But then he wraps them up in a piece of tissue paper and puts them carefully away in his vest pocket!

* * * * *

The later years of Thompson's life in London after his return from Pantasaph seem to have been comparatively uneventful save

that his growing fame brought him into contact with many of the great *littérateurs* of the day, and for an incident in 1897 which might have ended disastrously. He had been smoking in bed in his apartments, and having fallen asleep, awoke to find himself surrounded with flames. He jumped up, fortunately in time to enable him to escape without more injury than a night spent on the streets and the wrath which an irate landlady poured, justly enough, upon him. "My hands were terribly burned," he afterwards wrote, "and I sustained a dreadful shock. . . . The room was quite burned out."

For some years before his death, Thompson was a familiar object in London streets, communing with "the seraphim and young-eyed cherubim" as he passed along. Like Tennyson's Sir Galahad he mused on joy that will not cease—

Pure spaces clothed in living beams—

and neither the noise nor the fog of London streets could dispel his visions. He would wander about alone, apparently in an aimless fashion, but in reality absorbed in his own lavendered dreams—that state of alienation

from passing things so necessary for thoughts "both high and deep." Often enough he might have been seen clad—winter and summer alike—in a brown cloak, or ulster, and with a basket, like a fish basket, slung around his shoulders. This he used to carry the books he had to review. Though of a painfully shy and retiring disposition, he was a cheerful companion, with the saving grace of humour. One who knew him well as boy and man states that "in him there sat enthroned not only the stern and haughty muse of Tragedy, but her gentler sister, Comedy." He was, too, as numerous passages in his works denote, a keen student of science. One failing—if failing it be—he certainly had: he detested letter-writing. Even when he did write letters, he forgot, at times, to post them. A letter of many pages, written and directed to one of his sisters in 1899, was discovered among his papers at his death, eight years later! The picture would hardly be complete without adding that, according to some (the late Mr Patmore among them), Thompson was one of the best talkers in the city. He spoke from his own convictions with extreme fluency, yet weighing his words in matters of a controversial nature,

and careful always to avoid offence. The hieratic order of the universe, the culture and ethics of the Greeks, the philosophy of the schoolmen, the tactics of military commanders in bygone centuries, the latest advance in science—alike gave opportunity for the silver and gold surprises of his speech to the few (the very few) with whom he was familiar. On his favourite lines in Shakespeare, in Milton, and in Shelley, or the merits and virtues and the hundred niceties of style of his cricket heroes of the past, he would enlarge for hours.

That he reverted to the taking of laudanum in his later years (after having been cured during the period of his best poetic work) was due to medical reasons. The one specific that could ease his terrible nerve pains, if it did not actually keep him alive, its use had become as much a necessity as the anæsthetics or the doses of physic ordinarily prescribed for others. We know from Mr Meynell, his intimate companion to the end, that Thompson not only preached a strict asceticism but (like the true Franciscan tertiary that he was) practised it as well, and that he was not only one of the most temperate, but one also of the most innocent and retiring, of men.

Emaciated and worn by disease, he could still exhibit an extraordinary glow and vivacity of manner. He dealt largely in the names and rites of old: the pomp of old-time facts formed the pomp of his present dreams.

The same mental abstraction which had caused him to be nearly run over at Manchester in his student days—which on another occasion had caused him to be lost on the South Downs —which resulted in the burning of the bed on which he had fallen asleep while smoking in his apartments—and which is evidently hinted at in the incident of his alighting at the wrong station on the visit to Boscombe, in the "Prince of Destiny"—followed him in all his moves.

He seldom spoke of his nightmare days; when he did, it was not complainingly. He could not have written with Tennyson—

> *I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,*
> *And gather dust and chaff; and call*
> *To what I feel is Lord of all,*
> *And faintly trust the larger hope.*

Aloof from men he dwelt with God, recognizing to the full—

All which I took from thee I did but take
Not for thy harms
But just that thou mightst seek it in My arms.

Who can doubt the evident sincerity of the lines in "Any Saint"?

But He a little hath
Declined His stately path
And my
Feet set more high.

* * * *

And bolder now and bolder
I lean upon that shoulder,
So near
He is, and dear.

Though his lot in life was so opposite to that of the happy soul in Crashaw's "Temperance"—

The happy soul, that all the way
To Heaven, hath a summer's day—

he was not soured by his dreadful experiences, but with heart warmed by the Divine presence, accepted them in a patient, matter-of-fact way, conscious that he had kept "the white bird in his breast" protected. To other writers he

was invariably generous. One who had been associated with him in literary work testifies: "A more careful or more generous reviewer never lived; to contemporary poets, indeed, he was over tender, and *I never heard him speak an ungenerous word of any living soul.*"

Devoted to his faith, enthusiastic when writing of her

> *About whose moonèd brows*
> *Seven stars make seven glows*
> *Seven stars for seven woes—*

in word and work alike severely chaste—he has already been called "Our Lady's Poet." A more loyal courtier of the Queen of Heaven it would certainly be difficult to find!

A contributor to the *Church Times* (March 1911) writes that in later life Thompson always exculpated his father from any share in the break with the family which marked the poet's early years in London; and clung to the recollection that they met again, when the father had been "entirely kind."[1]

The poet's fondness for children was of the

[1] Whether they actually met is a matter of doubt. Sister Austin (Thompson's sister—the Nun) thinks they did meet, at Rhyl, but cannot be positive.

most natural kind. He did not condescend to them; he was one of themselves. Elaborate dissection of the child-mind did not commend itself to him at all. "He was content [as a writer in the *Christian World Pulpit* puts it] to play with children without analysing them, and to pass with them through their own secret doorways into the wonder-world to which they belong." In reply to the question which he himself asks, "Know you what it is to be a child?" he gives the answer: "It is to have a spirit still streaming from the waters of baptism. It is to believe in love, to believe in loveliness, to believe in belief. It is to be so little that the elves can reach to whisper in your ear; it is to turn pumpkins into coaches, and mice into horses, lowness into loftiness, and nothing into everything." [1]

The poet's unaffected child-love is revealed in many a passage in his works. In "The Hound of Heaven" it is not in the wind-walled Palace of Nature, nor yet in the wilful face of skies, but it *is* with the little children that he makes the easing of the human smart come nearest to realization! And in another poem, "To my Godchild," in Faith-drenched lines

[1] "Essay on Shelley."

he makes it clear it is in the "Nurseries of Heaven" that he would be placed:

Then, as you search with unaccustomed glance
The ranks of Paradise for my countenance,
Turn not your tread along the Uranian sod
Among the bearded counsellors of God;
For, if in Eden as on earth are we,
I sure shall keep a younger company:
Pass where beneath their rangèd gonfalons
The starry cohorts shake their shielded suns,
The dreadful mass of their enridgèd spears;
Pass where majestical the eternal peers,
The stately choice of the great saintdom, meet—
A silvern segregation, globed complete
In sandalled shadow of the Triune feet;

* * * * *

Pass the crystalline sea, the lampads seven:—
Look for me in the nurseries *of Heaven.*

* * * * *

Thompson died of consumption. At the beginning of November 1907 he entered, on the advice of his friends, the Hospital of St Elizabeth and St John, in St John's Wood, London. There he died on the 13th of the same month, in his forty-eighth year. Prepared for the end, he had received the last

Sacraments, and was ready when the summons, long expected, came.

At the time of entering the Hospital he was so terribly emaciated that he weighed but five stone. The devoted Sister (Mother Michael) who tended him states that he was very quiet and wonderfully unselfish in the ward, where he was visited from time to time by members of the Meynell family. It is a curious circumstance, worthy of passing mention, that among the books which he kept within reach as he lay dying, was Mr Jacobs' "Many Cargoes." He was interred on the 16th of November in St Mary's Cemetery, Kensal Green. His grave bears a stone on which, in beautiful lettering (the work of the sculptor, Eric Gill,) are the words:

FRANCIS THOMPSON,
1859—1907
"LOOK FOR ME IN THE NURSERIES OF HEAVEN."

Surely no more suitable epitaph from his own works could have been chosen for one who, with all his gifts, was still a child at heart!

The sorrows of his earlier days had endeared him to his friends, and if the "uses of his

adversity" had any sweets at all, among them must surely be reckoned the added endearment of those he cherished. In his coffin were roses from the garden of Mr George Meredith, inscribed with Mr Meredith's testimony, "A true poet, one of a small band"; and violets from kindred turf were sent by Mrs Meynell, whose praises he had with such soul-worship sung. Mr Meynell's biographical note prefaced to the volume of "Selected Poems" ends: "Devoted friends lament him, no less for himself than for his singing. He had made all men his debtors, leaving to those who loved him the memory of a unique personality, and to English poetry an imperishable name."

Ah, songs divine! alchymic gems, hard earned!
Ah, spendthrift soul that gloried in the price!
In every aching syllable beauty burned
Wrung from the utter dregs of sacrifice.[1]

His rich and varied colourings with their old-time touches of recaptured glory; his rapt mysticism and paradisal airs; the wide range of his mental vision, and the answering splendours of his lofty imaginings, have placed

[1] Chas. J. Whitby in *The Poetry Review*, January February, 1919.

him high in the permanent ranks of fame. "The nineteenth century's evening star" [1] in the firmament of poetry, (as he has been aptly described,) it is true to say of Thompson —as of Keats, Shelley and Tennyson—that so long as poems are read, so long will some of them, at least, be his, and his name be counted memorable by generations still to come, jealous of the high traditions of our English song.

[1] Basil de Selincourt in the *Manchester Guardian*, November 20, 1913.

SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF FRANCIS THOMPSON'S VERSE

O ye dead Poets, who are living still,
Immortal in your verse, though life be fled—
And ye, O living Poets, who are dead,
Though ye are living, if neglect can kill—
Tell me if in your darkest hours of ill
With drops of anguish falling fast and red
From the sharp crown of thorns upon your head,
Ye were not glad your errand to fulfil?

LONGFELLOW.

SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF FRANCIS THOMPSON'S VERSE

Whatever singing-robe thou wear
Has the Paradisal air.

LOVE IN DIAN'S LAP.

IN literature, as in science and art, the great works of the high thinkers have not always obtained immediate appreciation. Indeed, many of the writers whom the verdict of time has placed among the Immortals have, according to their biographers, been slow of recognition. Coleridge, Keats, and, to a greater extent, Wordsworth, may be cited off-hand as examples of poets whose works remained enshrined for many years in the breasts of comparatively few readers.

It need occasion no surprise, therefore, that Francis Thompson's poetry, although hailed with delight by the critics, is not yet as widely known as its merits deserve; nor need it be thought that his verse will pass into oblivion because, in the short space since the poet's death, it has not become the subject of universal acclamation. Great poetry advances but slowly in general estimation. Its appeal

is always in the first instance to the more discerning thinkers, and *then* to the larger body who are content to, or must of necessity, follow their lead. Of poetry meant—like Thompson's—to feed the soul and elevate the mind, rather than tickle the vanity or follow the fashions of the age, it is especially true that its complete recognition must be the result of that maturer judgment which time alone can give. Doubtless, also, the deep symbolism pervading many of Thompson's poems must be taken into account in any consideration of the ultimate estimate of his work; but it should be remembered that symbolism, when combined with clarity of vision and depth of poetical insight, may be the stronghold for a precious message which might, without such protection, be lost.

It has been well said that in all real poetry —poetry that is to endure—there must be certain essentials: melody of rhythm; fertility of ideas; beauty of sentiment; skilful dignification and blending of words; the faculty of seeing what is dark to others. To say that Thompson had a wonderful and fascinating melody of rhythm; a profusion of the loveliest ideas; a deep, reverent, and ever-present

sentiment and sense of the beauty on every side, and a profound mastery over many kinds of versification which he wedded to an extraordinary range of subjects—is not to exceed, but to fall below, the pronouncements of many of the greatest authorities. But over and above the richness of essentials, he had a vision so celestial, combined with an imagery so bold, yet withal so true and beautiful, that he stands unsurpassed in these qualities by any contemporary poet. Transcendent thought, glowing pictures, striking flashes of imagination, spell-binding touches of loveliness, passages of "intertwined intellectualism," abound in Thompson's verse. His is no more the poetry for an idle man, as a substitute for a cigar, than is Browning's. He takes an idea and develops it, adding layer after layer of thought with the insight of the seer, and the enthusiasm of the mystic saturated in consciousness of the supernatural. He roams heaven and earth alike in his quest for comparisons to illustrate the fancies of his mind. The marvel is that, being so heavily weighted with thought and symbol, he should proceed smoothly; yet proceed smoothly he does—a very Paganini of melodious sound and of swelling rapture.

From a simple flower he fashions the lines—

God took a fit of Paradise-wind,
A slip of cœrule weather,
A thought as simple as Himself,
And ravelled them together.

And from a snowflake—

What heart could have thought you?—
Past our devisal
(O filigree petal!)
Fashioned so purely,
Fragilely, surely,
From what Paradisal
Imagineless metal,
Too costly for cost?

True it is that such passages as—

Thou hast devoured mammoth and mastodon,
And many a floating bank of fangs,
The scaly scourges of thy primal brine,
And the tower-crested plesiosaure.
Thou fillest thy mouth with nations, gorgest slow
On purple æons of kings;—

(taken from his poem addressed to Earth) are to be found, yet nevertheless the same hand wrote the exquisitely simple lines:

Little Jesus, wast Thou shy
Once, and just so small as I?
And what did it feel like to be
Out of Heaven, and just like me?

* * * * *

I should think that I would cry
For my house all made of sky;
I would look about the air,
And wonder where my angels were.

Like Blake, it was his—

To see a world in a grain of sand,
A heaven in a wild flower—

Unlike Blake, his mysticism is never too deep for our mental conception, nor are his visions of awful holiness ever curtained with "vapours impenetrable."

If no songster has beaten so painfully against the bars of the flesh, surely none has sung, as Thompson, at times, with such an ecstasy of delight. If many of his poems are charged with self-conscious sadness and bitter self-analysis, there is still enough of joyous offering left to catch his readers "fast for ever in a tangle of sweet rhymes." To read his verse is to walk thereafter in a more beautiful,

though, perchance, more mystical world of life and thought, and of correlated greatness, with a tread which—

Stirring the blossoms in the meadow grass
Flickers the unwithering stars.

The world and human life were, to Thompson, "crammed with Heaven and aflame with God." Thus, while Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Browning speak of their spiritual experiences in a more or less uncertain way, the spiritual experiences of Thompson are as real as the physical—the practice of asceticism deliberately propounded and accepted. In "The Mistress of Vision" he puts forth his distinctive gospel and asks:

Where is the land of Luthany,
Where is the tract of Elenore?
I am bound therefor.

The answer is the heroic one of abnegation and self-denial contained in the lines which follow the passage quoted, abnegation and self-denial which he himself ardently practised. Doubtless this poem, "The Mistress of Vision," will rank eventually next to "The Hound of

Heaven" for spiritual potentiality allied with genius of inspiration.

Thompson's poetry is, as one writer puts it, "all compact of thought"—thought elaborated with exquisite subtlety, and an endless profusion and variety of metaphor and simile, drawn from a thousand sources, but most happily from his profound knowledge of the Old and New Testaments, and the philosophy, dogma, and liturgy of the Catholic Church. Indeed, to go back to the poet of "white fire," to whom Thompson has been most frequently compared: is not Crashaw himself often outstripped, even in his own special glory of "mixing heaven and earth," by our own poet?

Mr J. L. Garvin, on reading Thompson's first volume, wrote that in the rich and virile harmonies of his line—in strange and lovely vision—in fundamental meaning—Thompson is possibly the first of Victorian poets, and at least of none the inferior—a view which time has strengthened and the poet's later works confirmed. Whether the assertions of Mr G. K. Chesterton and others, that the critics now class Thompson with Shelley and Keats, be true or not, there can be no question

but that all serious critics are agreed in placing him among the imperishable names of English Song. Certainly no list of the four or five greatest poets of the nineteenth century would be conclusive without the name of Francis Thompson!

From the simple and lovely lines "To a Snowflake," "Daisy," "The Poppy," "The Making of Viola" (in which he describes the making of a child in Heaven), and the rest of his childhood verses, to the airy elegance of "Dream Tryst," and on again to "The Orient Ode" and the ode "From the Night of Forebeing"—Thompson passes from the simplest to the grandest elements of creation, and shows himself to be truly a

Great preappointed Prodigal of Song
This sad world soothing as he sweeps along.

Even Tennyson, with his great quality of making words musical is equalled, if not surpassed, by the younger poet. If anyone should doubt this, let him study the poems mentioned, and end with (reading aloud for preference) "Sister Songs." "Show me," declared Mr Arnold Bennett, "the divinest glories of Shelley and Keats, even of Tennyson, who

wrote the 'Lotus Eaters' and the songs in 'The Princess,' and I think I can match them all out of this one book" ("Sister Songs"). Verses such as the ones mentioned and the inspired "Mistress of Vision" (of which Sir A. T. Quiller-Couch declared that no such poem had been written since Coleridge attempted, and left off writing, "Kubla Khan") will continue to soar among the peaks of literature as "The Hound of Heaven" will continue to be cherished—though its full grandeur may be grasped only by the comparative few—to the end of time.

A glance through any of the volumes of Thompson's poems will at once show that many of his lines need careful study, besides the assistance of a dictionary and books of reference on many subjects—ancient and modern. But this may be said with certainty: if the precise hues of the poet's meaning cannot always be seen at once, the central idea is clear enough, and glory of colour *is present*, though its splendours may be too great for immediate comprehension. Writing on this aspect of the poet's works, a writer in the *Irish Rosary* for September 1912 says: "There is no mist or

haze attached to his imagery. They will catch away the mind's breath at the first flash, but when they have been read carefully, they will soon become clear-seen and clear-cut, even brilliant in their obscurity, obvious perhaps by their very unexpectedness. His most intricate harmonies are loaded with a rush of music that may perplex, but which works itself out in the end, perhaps upon the quaver of the last syllable: the feeling remains with the reader all the time that nobody else could quite have written it, and that Thompson himself could not have written anything else, that his words and expressions have waited a thousand years for his coming to claim and set them to the highest use. He did not open his images like skylights to make clear a chance meaning here and there in his work, but he opened, as it were, a whole apse of windows to illuminate one central idea throned altar-wise. Each of his poems is builded delicately, like a great window of stained glass, and every fragment of it is filled with the rich colour inherent to his words. At the first rush of thought the eyes are dazzled as by a sudden blaze from above, yet at a little distance every word falls harmonized and ordered into a network of metre,

which grapples colour to colour and syllable to syllable as simply and convincingly as the beaded lead that controls the splendoured glories of some rose-window."

In the qualities peculiarly his own—the combination of spiritual fervour and insensuous passion, courtly love and saintly reverence, ecclesiastical pageantry and liturgical splendour—in his mountain-top ecstasies and the remoter flights of his wonderful imagination—he stands absolutely apart from any other English singer!

That our poet knew something at least of the greatness of his work may be gathered from the lines:

I hang 'mid men my needless head,
And my fruit is dreams, as theirs is bread;
The goodly men and the sun-hazed sleeper
Time shall reap, but after the reaper
The world shall glean of me—me the sleeper! POEMS.

With

The loud
Shouts of the crowd

he was not concerned. Rather would it have pleased him to know that his voice would

become audible when the "high noises" of the throng had passed. In his review of the poetry of Mrs Meynell, there occurs a passage which illustrates this, and might, in very truth, be applied to much of his own muse:

"*The footfalls of her muse waken not sounds, but silences. We lift a feather from the marsh and say: 'This way went a heron.'* . . . *It is poetry*, the spiritual voice of which will become audible when the 'high noises' of to-day have followed the feet that made them."

What other, of all the poetry of the nineteenth century, has awakened such silences of thought, such soulful meditation as "The Hound of Heaven," "The Mistress of Vision," and "The Anthem of Earth"? What other English poet has steered his poetical aeroplane to such marvellous heights and soared so frequently above the things of earth to the regions of unsullied ether—even to the "gold gateways of the stars"?

To come at length to another characteristic of Thompson's verse—reference must certainly be made to his frequent neologisms and his love of big words. To those who complain

of the poet's own coinage, it need only be said that the *use* he makes of words non-existent in pre-Thompsonian English is, after all, the poet's justification. To quote again from the *Irish Rosary*: "Delight, not indignation, is the proper attitude of people who are made suddenly aware that fine gold has just been brought to light in their rock-garden." To those who complain of the length of his words, it may be said that although, when they are viewed separately, one wonders how many of the huge boulder-like word-formations ever got hoisted safely into their places, *once in position*, they so fit the great structures of which they form part that their rugged masses are absorbed in the total effect. Exceptions there are, here and there, "misfits" few indeed and "far between" which certain of the critics have not failed to make the most of, but which leave the general beauties of the poet's edifice untouched.

That the poet who, in his own words,

Drew the bolt of Nature's secrecies,

should abound in "Nature touches" is what might be expected. "*Mist* of tears," "*vistaed*

hopes," "*chasmèd* fears," "*skyey* blossoms," "*vapourous* shroudage," "*dawning* answers," "sighful *branches*," "tones of *floating light*," "poet's *calyxed* heart," "*windy* trammel," "cowled *night*," "the *cascade* of the *larch*,"—and a hundred other examples might be given of descriptions drawn from natural phenomena in Thompson's poetry.

Another feature still of Thompson's verse is its astonishing variety:

The freshness of May, and the sweetness of June,
And the fire of July in its passionate noon—

each finds a place in the gorgeous "pomp and prodigality" of his muse. Lines on her "Who is heaven's Queen," on Children, on Cricket, on the English Martyrs, on the Dead Cardinal of Westminster (Cardinal Manning)—verses of "utter chastity" on the benefactress whom he calls his "dear administress" (the inspirer of the group of poems "Love in Dian's Lap")—chants of the Autumn and Nature—odes to the rising and sinking Sun—poetic representation of scientific truth—poems of sadness and poems of ecstasy—detached fragments of thought and

philosophy—flights into the realms of theology and mysticism—images drawn from the Scriptures and the liturgy of the Church,—all are there, with many a word of "learnèd length and thundering sound" adorning, without loading, the sense he wishes to convey. Admirers of Shelley will come across many a passage of Shelleyan flavour: lovers of Shakespeare many a passage of Shakesperean touch. Take as an example of the latter (one only out of many in "Sister Songs"):

From cloud-zoned pinnacles of the secret spirit
Song falls precipitant in dizzying streams;
And, like a mountain hold when war-shouts stir it,
The mind's recessèd fastness casts to light
Its gleaming multitudes, that from every height
Unfurl the flaming of a thousand dreams.

In such a treasury it is difficult to pick and choose for samples of the poet's work—"the something more than art and diviner than genius"—of Thompson, but the following passages from the pieces indicated will serve to give *some* idea to the uninitiated of the poet's style:

I.

Yet, even as the air is rumorous of fray
Before the first shafts of the sun's onslaught
From gloom's black harness splinter,
And Summer move on Winter
With the trumpet of the March, and the pennon
of the May ;
As gesture outstrips thought ;
So, haply, toyer with ethereal strings !
Are thy blind repetitions of high things
The murmurous gnats whose aimless hoverings
Reveal song's summer in the air ;
The outstretched hand, which cannot thought
declare,
Yet is thought's harbinger.
These strains the way for thine own strains
prepare ;
We feel the music moist upon this breeze,
And hope the congregating poesies.

SISTER SONGS.

II.

Lo, in the sanctuaried East,
Day, a dedicated priest
In all his robes pontifical exprest,
Lifteth slowly, lifteth sweetly,

From out its Orient tabernacle drawn,
Yon orbèd sacrament confest
Which sprinkles benediction through the dawn;
And when the grave procession's ceased,
The earth with due illustrious rite
Blessed,—ere the frail fingers featly
Of twilight, violet-cassocked acolyte,
His sacerdotal stoles unvest—
Sets, for high close of the mysterious feast,
The sun in august exposition meetly
Within the flaming monstrance of the West.

ORIENT ODE.

III.

Where is the land of Luthany,
And where the region Elenore?
I do faint therefor.
When to the new eyes of thee
All things by immortal power,
Near or far,
Hiddenly
To each other linkèd are,
That thou canst not stir a flower
Without troubling of a star;
When thy song is shield and mirror
To the fair snake-curlèd Pain,
Where thou dar'st affront her terror

That on her thou may'st attain
Perséan conquest; seek no more,
O seek no more!
Pass the gates of Luthany, tread the region
Elenore!

THE MISTRESS OF VISION.

IV.

How should I gauge what beauty is her dole,
Who cannot see her countenance for her soul,
As birds see not the casement for the sky?
And, as 'tis check they prove its presence by,
I know not of her body till I find
My flight debarred the heaven of her mind.
Hers is the face whence all should copied be,
Did God make replicas of such as she;
Its presence felt by what it does abate,
Because the soul shines through tempered and
mitigate:
Where—as a figure labouring at night
Beside the body of a splendid light—
Dark Time works hidden by its luminousness;
And every line he labours to impress
Turns added beauty, like the veins that run
Athwart a leaf which hangs against the sun.

LOVE IN DIAN'S LAP (Her Portrait).
(Lines dedicated to Mrs Meynell).

Of Shelley and Keats—if reference must be made—it will suffice to say that, singularly tuneful and marvels of pure melody as their own verses are, it is a relief at times to pass from their more earthly sweetness to the loftier heights and spiritual beauties of Francis Thompson—the poet "God-smitten,"—though each can be appreciated without disparagement of the others. If we contrast the lines from Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" (the poem which most of all contains his own special "Gospel"):

Thy light alone—like mist o'er mountains driven,
Or music by the night wind sent,
Thro' strings of some still instrument,
Or moonlight on a midnight stream,
Gives grace and truth to life's unquiet dream.
Love, Hope, and Self-esteem, like clouds depart
And come, for some uncertain moments lent.
Man were immortal, and omnipotent,
Didst thou, unknown and awful as thou art,
Keep with thy glorious train firm state within his heart.

* * * * *

I vowed that I would dedicate my powers
To thee and thine—have I not kept the vow?

* * * * *

The day becomes more solemn and serene
When noon is past—there is a harmony
In autumn, and a lustre in its sky,
Which thro' the summer is not heard or seen,
As if it could not be, as if it had not been!
Thus let thy power, which like the truth
Of nature on my passive youth
Descended, to my onward life supply
Its calm—to one who worships thee,
And every form containing thee,
Whom, Spirit fair, thy spells did bind
To fear himself, and love all human kind.

And the lines from Keats—

So let me be thy choir, and make a moan
Upon the midnight hours;
Thy voice, thy lute, thy pipe, thy incense sweet
From swingèd censer teeming:
Thy shrine, thy grove, thy oracle, thy heat
Of pale-mouthed prophet dreaming.
Yes, I will be thy priest, and build a fane
In some untrodden region of my mind,
Where branched thoughts, new grown with pleasant pain,
Instead of pines shall murmur in the wind—

along with the rest of Keats's "Ode to

Psyche" (an ode in which he took special pains to express his distinctive thought), with Thompson's "Hound of Heaven," or the latter's poem "To Any Saint" (one of the most marvellous compendiums of Christian mysticism ever penned in poetic lines)—it will be obvious that each poet has an unchallengeable beauty of form in which to convey his own special message and in which he stands supreme.

If the message of Shelley was—as it seems to have been—that Love and Beauty shall endure to unite all things; and the message of Keats to restore the spirit of the Greeks and "Art for Art's sake," that of Francis Thompson is, to proclaim not only the "embroidery on the veil," but the glory of the veiled One Himself —the "Beauty ever Ancient and ever New" —and to repeat the cry of old:

Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee.

This sentence of the Aristotle of Christianity echoes through the poetry of Francis Thompson —and if literary fame, to be immortal, must be linked with an undying message, then, surely, to the poet of "terrible depths and *triumphant heights*" is Immortality assured.

NOTES ON SOME OF FRANCIS THOMPSON'S POEMS

THE HOUND OF HEAVEN

Fear wist not to evade as Love wist to pursue.
THE HOUND OF HEAVEN.

THE trite saying that "a knowledge of the man makes for the understanding of his work" is especially true of the world's great poets. Without some knowledge of the life-story of him who sold matches in the street and wrote "The Hound of Heaven"—a knowledge of that strange and unhappy story sufficient at least to afford a clue to the meaning of the broken fragments of his heart which we find in his works—many of the pictures of his "Titanic glooms" and of his "mangled youth" which he presents for our mental gaze would be altogether inexplicable.

The son of a doctor—educated for the priesthood, but rejected when his "vocation" came to be tested—a student of medicine who had given more time to reading the poets than works on anatomy and had failed in his medical examinations—a weakly supersensitive youth, who, born a poet and caring only for "poesy divine," had angered his father and left his home in Lancashire to "fall on evil

days" and know the "mired and hungered ways" of London streets—a dreamer who had thought to "swing the earth a trinket at his wrist," but had found it "with heavy griefs" too overplussed—such had been the career of Francis Thompson before the discovery by a brother poet, and the world, of his genius. Fortunate whenever in the year and a half preceding his "discovery" he had the wherewith to spend the night with a roof over his head, we read of him being on one occasion in a common lodging-house with a man who was supposed to be an uncaught murderer; on another, of his rescue from starvation by a girl, poor as De Quincey's *Ann*, who took him to her lodgings and tenderly nursed him; that he had been a caller of cabs and vender of matches in the streets; and had become a physical wreck from ill-health and privation at the time when his genius as the Prodigal of Song came unexpectedly to be recognized. Withdrawn from the streets and helped by the kindness and ever loving care of his rescuer—the "guide, philosopher and friend" of his after years—the outpouring of that wonderful verse which has placed him in the small band of the Immortals had already

begun, when, in the year 1893, "The Hound of Heaven" (written in 1891) first reached the public.

Such in briefest outline is the story of that inspired singer—the "Laureate of Pain"—who, at the time he wrote the Ode we are about to consider, still bore about with him the visible scars of the Battle of Life, one of the grimmest that ever fell to poet's lot, and whose soul, sombred by shadows and saddened by the destruction of many of his "vistaed hopes," was cheered nevertheless by visions celestial, in which he saw all he had "fancied as lost stored for him at Home," and in which—despite the bitter memories of the past—despite of being "of all men's clotted clay the dingiest clot" he heard the invitation of the great Lover—

Rise, clasp My hand, and come!

* * * * *

Turning now to the subject-matter of "The Hound of Heaven," it may be said that its theme is as old as the heart of man: it is the particular application of it, the grandeurs and the pathos, the compelling instancy of the verse, with its peculiarity of intense human

interest throughout, which are new. Written, as the poem is, from the standpoint of a soul in a state of unrest, pursued by God and God's unfathomable Love, but as yet unwilling to yield to that Love lest all else must be cast aside or given up, we gather from the majestic opening that the love-chase has already been a long one. The word "labyrinthine," occurring almost at the outset and sometimes stated to be of Thompson's own coinage, is to be found, as a matter of fact, in many pre-"Hound of Heaven" verses.[1] Having pleaded "by many a hearted casement, curtained red,"[2] the pursued one flees "across the margent of the world" even to "the gold gateways of the stars" from his "tremendous Lover." Returned to earth, he is at times (as when in the presence of children)

[1] "Labyrinthine" occurs in Shelley ("Revolt of Islam"); Wordsworth's "Excursion"; Browning's "Sordello," etc. Notable examples of its use in prose are to be found in Lamb's "A Chapter on Ears" ("Essays of Elia"), Ruskin's "Arrows of the Chace," and Kingsley's "Yeast."

[2] Compare with—

"And thou—what needest with thy tribe's black tents,
Who hast the red-pavilion of my heart?"

of Thompson's "Arab Love Song."

inclined to be elated—at others wailful or despondent. Whether "one in the fellowship of Nature" (not indeed the solacing "Nature" of Wordsworth, but "Nature" the poor "stepdame" who cannot "slake his drouth") or awaking from the sleep wherein he sees the failures of the past—his "mangled youth" dead beneath their heap—whether buoyed by the morning or heavy with the even—he is alike conscious of the persistent, disturbing "pursuit" of the swift and strong Feet which follow after, of a Voice which, if we may borrow the words of St Augustine, "calls, and cries aloud, and forces open his deafness." Go where he will in flight, or fear, the Great Pursuer—remorseless, inexorable, tireless—steps in to prevent that "strange, piteous, futile thing" from securing the satisfaction sought. After long and fruitless strivings, related with a dramatic force and variety of daring imagery that stamp the work as one of the masterpieces of religious verse, the pursued one is bowed in grief. Smitten to his knees, in an intensity of sadness and humiliation of heart, he cries out—

Naked I wait Thy love's uplifted stroke!

The graphic image which follows—

In the rash lustihead of my young powers,
I shook the pillaring hours
And pulled my life upon me—

is obviously meant to recall Samson pulling down the house of the Philistines and perishing in the ruins. The truant's energies spent, he sees at last the utter futility of his dreams and of "the linked fantasies, in whose blossomy twist" he had "swung the earth a trinket at his wrist" in his flight from the long pursuit of the ever following Feet. Those other words of the great Augustine—"Thou hast formed us for Thyself alone and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee"—will suggest themselves to many as they read of the Voice that like "a bursting sea" surrounds the pursued soul towards the conclusion of the poem—

And is thy earth so marred,
Shattered in shard on shard?
Lo, all things fly thee, for thou fliest Me!

If the *mist of tears*[1] and *vistaed* hopes and *chasmèd* fears of the introductory lines suppose

[1] Mrs Meynell has "mists of tears" in *San Lorenzo's Mother*.

the mountained heights, the end supposes the depths of the Valley of Calm, where the surrender of the tired wanderer follows as a fitting climax in lines of the most touching and exquisite simplicity :—

Halts by me that footfall,
Is my gloom, after all,
Shade of His hand, outstretched caressingly ?
" *Ah, fondest, blindest, weakest,*
I am He Whom thou seekest !
Thou dravest love from thee, who dravest Me."

* * * * * *

This experience of the soul pursued by an excess of Love Divine has often been that of the Saints and Mystics. St John of the Cross and St Teresa (with whose works Thompson was familiar) and many other mystical writers have expressed the same idea. The words addressed to Mechthild of Magdeburg in the same connection are so explicit that one may perhaps be pardoned for quoting them here. " I chased thee, for this was my pleasure," said the Voice of Love to that exquisite Mystic ; " I captured thee, for this was my desire ; I bound thee, and I rejoice in thy bonds ; I have wounded thee that thou

mayest be united to me. If I gave thee blows, it was that I might be possessed of thee." [1]

* * * * *

The sense of exhaustion immediately following the lines:

Ah! must—
Designer infinite!
Ah! must Thou char the wood ere Thou canst limn with it?

will recall to some minds the passage of Vaughan's "Pursuit" which runs:

Hadst Thou given to this active dust
A state untir'd,
The lost son had not left the husk,
Nor home desir'd.
That was Thy secret, and it is
Thy mercy too;
For when all fails to bring to bliss,
Then this must do.
Ah, Lord! and what a purchase will that be,
To take us sick, *that* sound *would not take Thee.*

* * * * *

It has been suggested in a Magazine article [2] that the word *Hound* in the title of the

[1] Evelyn Underhill's "Mysticism" (6th ed.).
[2] *The Rosary*, September, 1912.

Poem may have been borrowed or adopted from Celtic mythology, in which the appellation *Hound of Ulster* is applied to a hero of Irish romance.

In Swinburne's "Atalanta" we have the line—

When the hounds of Spring *are on winter's traces,*

but nearer than either to the Thompsonian "Hound of Heaven"—nearer, too, than the "Domini Canes" the Dominican *Hounds* of the Lord—comes the *heaven's swingèd hound* of Shelley: and surely if Thompson was influenced by another in his choice of title it would have been by his own favourite poet, whose "Prometheus Unbound" (in which the words so strikingly near, occur) he has in some of the finest prose in the language pronounced to be the greatest and most prodigal exhibition of Shelley's powers.

Leaving the question of the *title* (which after all, whatever its origin, is not altogether a happy one), and turning again to "The Hound of Heaven" itself, while it is abundantly clear that the main colouring is taken from the nights and days misted with the "mist of tears," but illumined by many a mystical gleam of

its author's own life, certain verses there are of other poets which may have added a tint here or there, or, present subconsciously to Thompson's mind, have influenced his thought. A Poem which bears a spiritual affinity to "The Hound of Heaven," inasmuch that in both it is Divine Love which seeks a straying soul, is Vaughan's "Retirement" written about 1650. In the Silurist's lines the Pursuer is represented under the gentle figure of a Dove: His "mild Dove" sent to show the straying one home and "put him in the way." The concluding line of the second verse contains a rather curious expression, "love-twist," which recalls Thompson's "blossomy-twist," and which by its significant use we may perhaps liken to the "Arm outstretched caressingly" of "The Hound of Heaven."

Press not to be
Still thy own foe and Mine; for to this day
I did delay,
And would not see, but chose to wink;
Nay, at the very brink
And edge of all
When thou wouldst fall,
My love-twist *held thee up, My unseen link.*

An essential difference in the two poems is revealed when they are compared in full. In the older verses it would appear that there has been *violation* of God's law by the soul concerned: in the modern lines it is the *evasion* of *God's Love*, lest it should be all-engrossing—lest, like a weed, it should not suffer even the *innocent* flowers not its own to mount, which enters into the theme.

In the beautiful lines (earlier still than Vaughan's) of George Herbert sometimes given under the title of "The Pulley" and sometimes of "The Gifts of God," we have a Poem differing in many respects from "The Hound of Heaven," yet in some senses similar too, inasmuch as certain of the ideas seem to be, as it were, faintly echoed, and others to find a kind of parallel, in passages of the Thompsonian Ode. Herbert's verses are so short that no apology need be made for giving them in full:—

When God at first made man,
Having a glass of blessings standing by:
"Let us" (said He) "pour on him all we can:
Let the world's riches, which dispersèd lie,
Contract into a span."

So strength first made a way ;
Then beauty flowed ; then wisdom, honour, pleasure ;
When almost all was out, God made a stay ;
Perceiving, that alone, of all His treasure,
" Rest " in the bottom lay.

For if I should (said He),
Bestow this jewel also on my creature,
He would adore my gifts instead of Me ;
And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature :
So both should losers be.

Yet let him keep the rest,
But keep them with repining restlessness :
Let him be rich and weary ; that, at least,
If goodness lead him not, yet weariness
May toss him to my breast.

Thompson's invitation

Come then, ye other children, Nature's—share
With me your delicate fellowship ;

would evoke, we may imagine, something of the like fear in the great Pursuer that man would

Rest in Nature, not the God of Nature—

of Herbert—while

Nature, poor stepdame, cannot slake my drouth; [1]
Never did milk of hers once bless
My thirsting mouth—

is vaguely significant in its sense of double loss of:

So both should losers be.

So, too,

Lo! naught contents thee, who content'st not Me,

seems more or less parallel with

Keep them with repining restlessness—

of the earlier lines.

Towards the conclusion of "The Hound of Heaven," the note of fatigue—

My freshness spent its wavering shower i' the dust—

may be compared with

[1] "Drouth" occurs in Milton and Shakespeare.

If goodness lead him not, yet weariness
May toss him to my breast—

of the gentle Herbert.

* * * * *

To come, now, nearer our own times (if one may play leapfrog with the centuries without irreverence), Thompson's

I tempted all His servitors, but to find
My own betrayal in their constancy,
In faith to Him their fickleness to me,
Their traitorous trueness, and their loyal deceit,

cannot fail to strike many by its resemblance to the well-known oxymoron in Tennyson's "Elaine":

His honour rooted in dishonour stood,
And faith, unfaithful, kept him falsely true—

whilst in the pleading Voice and pursuing Feet of "The Hound of Heaven" numerous readers will be irresistibly reminded of Christina Rossetti's devotional lines, "Despised and Rejected," a poem of kindred conception, in which a Voice (the Voice of the Divine Stranger) pleads all night long for admission to a soul whose door is barred against His tired Feet.

* * * * *

The idea of "the arches of the years" in the wonderful prelude of "The Hound of Heaven" would almost certainly be suggested by the Bridge of Human Life in the lovely "Vision of Mirza" contributed by Addison to *The Spectator* under date Saturday, September 1, 1711. This bridge (seen by Mirza after he had listened to the tunes of the shepherd-clad genius which reminded him of "those heavenly airs that are played to the departed souls of good men upon their first arrival in Paradise, to wear out the impressions of their last agonies") consisted of "*threescore and ten entire arches with several broken arches*, which, added to those that were entire, made up the number about an hundred." A mind, like Thompson's, on the lookout for superfine prose and acquainted with the choicest literature of all ages, would certainly be struck by and be likely to store up in its inward recesses, at least sublatently, such a literary treasure.

Among the older English poets there is perhaps none with whom it is more interesting to compare Francis Thompson than Richard Crashaw. An example showing something of the kinship of spirit, often noted, between the

modern Crashaw (the "Crashaw born greater") and the Canon of Loretto, may be seen in the concluding portion of "The Hound of Heaven" (where, the long pursuit over, the "child's mistake" ends happily in the Divine embrace), and Crashaw's "Counsel to a Lady" concerning her choice of life:—

Let not my Lord, the mighty Lover
Of souls, disdain that I discover
The hidden art
Of His high stratagem to win your heart:
It was His heavenly art
Kindly to cross you
In your mistaken love;
That, at the next remove
Thence, He might toss you
And strike your troubled heart
Home to Himself, to hide in His breast,
The bright ambrosial nest
Of love, of life, and everlasting rest.
Happy mistake!
That thus shall wake
Your wise soul, never to be won
Now with a love beneath the sun.

"Their silences speak aloud" occurring earlier in the same poem and "They speak by

silences" in the earlier part, too, of "The Hound of Heaven" need no comment—while in both poems the quest of the Lover (whether it be the *mighty Lover* of the one, or the *tremendous Lover* of the other) is essentially the same.

Another still of these curious resemblances may be found in some lines of the sixteenth century Father Southwell. Thompson's

Whether man's heart or life it be which yields
Thee harvest, must Thy harvest-fields
Be dunged with rotten death?—

bear such a likeness to Southwell's

Did Christ manure thy heart to breed Him briers?
Or doth it need this unaccustom'd soyle
With hellish dung to fertile heaven's desires?

that we are almost forced to conclude that the later lines must have been evolved, consciously or unconsciously, out of the lines of the Martyr-poet written over three hundred years ago.

Finally, J. Stanyan Bigg's lines in "Night and the Soul" [1]—

[1] Published in 1854.

My glory has gone from me, and I stand
Like Samson underneath the reeling house—

will carry their own suggestion on a reference to Thompson's passage about the "pillaring hours" already referred to.

* * * * *

In modern poetry there is perhaps nothing so comparable with "The Hound of Heaven" in the suggestiveness of its main idea as the "Dio Amore" of Silvio Pellico.[1] Indeed, the similarity is such that, the materials of Thompson's life "ready to hand," it would be rash to deny the possibility that the "pursuing Love" refrain of "The Hound of Heaven" may have been prompted by that of the other verse. A translation of the whole of Pellico's poem appeared in *The Month* for July 1897: the portion following is taken therefrom:—

I love, and I have felt against my heart
The throbbing of my Lover's heart; it was—
Shall trembling lips dare tell?—
It was the Heart of God.

[1] Silvio Pellico, best known by "My Ten Years' Imprisonment," died in 1854.

Of God, who rayed with gleaming glory, rules
In the bright heavens, yet finds His chiefest joy
To be with little man
A-wandering in this vale.
The fair intelligences all-amazed
Behold that glory wrapped in fleshly veil
Descending to this heir
Of guilt and wretchedness,
And healing with His sacred hands the wounds
Of the poor mangled worm ; and to all worlds
Shouting His joy, should one
Poor sinner love Him back.
I saw Him through the deep abysmal gloom
Draw near me ; and I heard His gentle plaint :
" Why dost thou shrink and hide
From My pursuing love *? "*

A writer in the *Church Times* (Mr Paulet), under date April 7th, 1911, after pointing out the similarity, and quoting some of the lines just read, goes on to remark :—

Needless to say no one in his sane senses would dream of accusing Thompson, with his immortal vision, of plagiarizing ; but one is tempted to ask whether the Italian's poem was the seedling which lay in the poet's mind until such time as it should bear splendid fruitage in " The Hound

of Heaven" ;—or—which is even more interesting—did both poets experience the Divine insistency in such similar ways, as to lead to a not unlike expression of that experience?

Whether the original idea which developed in course of time into "The Hound of Heaven" was (as has been suggested) first planted in its author's mind by one of the poems of St John of the Cross with which he was familiar, or whether it arose solely out of the circumstances of the poet's life and his own innate sense of the Creator's proximity to and love of His creature, must remain a matter of surmise. If, however (as we are told is the case), the tiny seed which grew and developed into the greater poem of Wordsworth's "Ode on the Intimations of Immortality" was contained in the line "Bright shoots of everlastingness" of Vaughan's "Retreat," it hardly seems too fanciful to further suggest that Thompson *may* have been indebted for the original germ of "The Hound of Heaven" to the lines of the Italian patriot.

What must strike every reader of "The Hound of Heaven" is the astonishing variety and richness of its imagery. If a third or a

fourth the number of striking illustrations had been employed, we should still have a marvellous "gallery" in which to roam; we should still be amazed at the multiplicity as well as the beauty and reverential boldness of the subjects offered for consideration as the theme proceeds. Human love with its "intertwining charities" —the contemplation of Nature, wind and skies and clouds (those shapers of his moods)—the charm of little children (in whose eyes, it is interesting to note, he comes nearest the object of his quest)—his own dead youth with its background of gloom and sadness—the trumpet sounding from the hid battlements of Eternity—the Voice around him like a bursting sea—all these the eluder of Love Divine conjures up in "linkèd fantasies" of surprising felicity ere the climax of the soul's surrender is reached. For many readers of poetry a striking image presented now and again is sufficient not only to excite admiration but is perhaps the more appreciated by its very rarity. In "The Hound of Heaven," however, arresting similes and metaphors, as lovely as they are daring, in which the sadness is absorbed in the beautiful, occur in line after line. The thrill of wondering delight at the

boldness of the imagery is succeeded by another, and another still. We stop spellbound before some towering figure of speech afraid almost to pass on, lest another should come into view and shut out the first: or in amazement at the resounding and illuminating vocabulary, the glowing word-effects not to be found elsewhere in modern literature. Who else could have depicted majestic speed and deliberate instancy with the word-magic of "The Hound of Heaven?"

To all swift things for swiftness did I sue;
Clung to the whistling mane of every wind.
But whether they swept, smoothly fleet,
The long savannahs of the blue;
Or whether, Thunder-driven,
They clanged his chariot 'thwart a heaven,
Plashy with flying lightnings round the spurn o' their feet:—
Fear wist not to evade as Love wist to pursue.
Still with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbèd pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
Came on the following Feet,
And a Voice above their beat—
"Naught shelters thee, who wilt not shelter Me."

Great things and the small alike serve our poet's purpose. He is "gold-dusty with tumbling amidst the stars," [1] yet a piece of burnt wood becomes by his magic touch an instrument of "correlated greatness" supplying the clue from which to fashion

Designer infinite!—
Ah! must Thou char the wood ere Thou canst
limn with it?

and the pulp and rind of a fruit provide material and contrast sufficient to suggest a line of arresting interest.

The absence of any direct reference to the allurements of music seems somewhat noteworthy, but if a word of criticism be ventured it would not be at any omission, but rather at the very abundance, the superabundance indeed, of good things provided: the throng of images almost bewildering in their multiplicity—the ever-changing pictures of such absorbing interest that we become fascinated by each as it is presented to us and, pursuing *perforce* the "path of dalliance," forget to view the many as a whole. We lose sight of

[1] A description applied by Thompson to Shelley.

the wood in viewing, spellbound, the blossom on the trees!

In addition to the variety and daring, a word must be said as to the "comprehensiveness" of the imagery. Many of the lines will be found on a little scrutiny to be capable of a host of accordant conceptions. Take the one,

I swung the earth a trinket at my wrist,

or the "nature touches" exemplified by such expressions as "the pale ports o' the moon," "lucent-weeping out of the day-spring,"[1] "the red throb of its sunset-heart," "I laughed in the morning's eyes": what different interpretations cluster around each without exhausting the many possibilities of conception (conceptions other than the ones which first strike us) opened out. We read and read again our favourite passages from the "pleader, outlaw-wise" with

[1] This, and the two lines preceding it, are some of the most striking in the ode conveying, as they do, the idea of Nature's "other children" (air, sky, clouds, etc.) drinking in their taintless way the daily light of the dawn or sunrise from a chalice (a figure possibly of the sacramental cup) shining ("lucent") and dripping or overflowing ("weeping")—much stronger in the combination "lucent—weeping"—"out of the dayspring."

A feeling of sadness and longing
That is not akin to pain,
And resembles sorrow only
As the mist resembles the rain,—[1]

and discover each time some new tint or scintillation of meaning, some new "dawned answer" there, which had escaped us before. It is doubtful if the same mental beauties are conveyed to any two readers, or if any two artists familiar with the poem would depict their ideas of it, alike, on canvas. The general sense is apparent to all, yet each may prefer the pictures presented to his own point of view without doing violence to those offered to others: even the *same* passage will often suggest to the *same* individual a different picture on a further reading.

"The cistern contains: the fountain overflows"[2]—is a shrewd saying sometimes used to illustrate the difference between talent and genius. Applied to "The Hound of Heaven" the overflowing abundance of images, as beautiful as they are amazing, proclaims it at once a work of authentic genius.

We have jumped from one century to another

[1] Longfellow's "The Day is Done." [2] Blake.

in our search for passages of interest from other writers wherewith to compare "The Hound of Heaven," or wherefrom its author may have derived a hint: we must now return to our immediate subject. Whether Thompson was or was not indebted, in some degree, to other poets—whether any of the lines quoted did, or did not, influence him, it is after all his own peculiar genius and spiritual insight which make his Titanic Ode what it is. His "imitations," if such there be, are doubtless of the type more or less common in practically all the poets who were at the same time men of wide reading and susceptible minds. As the late W. M. Rossetti has pointed out, such men, when they come across an idea in print with which they find themselves in sympathy, straightway store it in their memories mixed as it were with their own thoughts, to be reproduced at some later period, possibly in years to come, coloured with their own fancies or stamped with their own distinctive mode of expression. How often something akin to the same mental phenomenon happens even among ourselves. You come across in reading, say, Shakespeare, two or three lines which make a deeper impression than the rest, for example:

True hope is swift, and flies with swallow's wings,
Kings it makes gods, and meaner creatures kings,[1]

and weeks or months after, when you have apparently quite forgotten the lines, you find yourself, perhaps in a letter to a friend, comparing the flight of time (the time perchance since your last letter to the friend in question) *with swallow's wings!* After all has been said, the facts that remain and that count, in estimating "The Hound of Heaven," are these: every line of it is stamped with Thompson's individuality, a style attributable to no one else; the majestic opening, the wealth of "devout audacities," the solemn splendours, the striking accompaniments, the complete working out of the theme, the wonderful dénouement—all these are his very own: and so adorned, the poem stands unique, not in English literature only, but in the literature of the world.

That very extraordinary genius William Blake, in a much quoted letter, used these words:—

I am more famed in heaven for my works than I could well conceive. In my brain are studies

[1] Richard III.

and chambers filled with books and pictures of old, which I wrote and painted in ages of eternity before my mortal life ; and these works are the delight and study of archangels.

We have not been told as yet what the archangels think about "The Hound of Heaven": possibly they are still busy considering Blake, and, if so, we can only surmise their fresh delight when Thompson's great ode is reached. For ourselves, if we seek authority, we have the opinions of the critics and of a multitude of men and women whose eminence in the world of letters entitles their pronouncements to respect. A few only of these weighty judgments can be given here :—

Coventry Patmore, a witness, surely, well qualified to judge, wrote as follows in *The Fortnightly Review* :—

"The Hound of Heaven" has so great and passionate and such a metre-creating motive, that we are carried over all obstructions of the rhythmical current, and are compelled to pronounce it, at the end, one of the few "great" odes of which the language can boast.

Mr J. L. Garvin, in *The Newcastle Chronicle*, sums up :—

We do not think we forget any of the splendid things of an English anthology when we say that "The Hound of Heaven" seems to us, on the whole, the most wonderful lyric in the language. It fingers all the stops of the spirit, and we hear now a thrilling and dolorous note of doom, and now the quiring of the spheres, and now the very pipes of Pan, but under all the still, sad music of humanity. It is the return of the nineteenth century to Thomas à Kempis !

Lady Burne-Jones, writing of her husband in 1893, refers incidentally to "The Hound of Heaven" and of the delight it afforded him, thus :—

The winter's labour was cheered by the appearance of a small volume of poems by an author whose name was till then unknown to us. The little book moved him to admiration and hope ; and, speaking of the poem he liked best in it, he said : "Since Gabriel's 'Blessed Damozel' no mystical words have so touched me as 'The Hound of Heaven.' Shall I ever forget how I undressed and dressed again, and had to undress

again—a thing I most hate—because I could think of nothing else?"

The Bishop of London, in one of his sermons, referred to Thompson's great Ode as "one of the most tremendous poems ever written."

The *Bookman* reviewer stated:—

The Sonnets (Shakespeare's) are the greatest soliloquy in literature. "The Hound of Heaven" and "Sister Songs" together are the second greatest; and there is no third.

The *Times*' reviewer wrote:—

It is not too early to say that people will still be learning it ("The Hound of Heaven") by heart two hundred years hence, for it has about it the unique thing that makes for immortality.

* * * * *

The poem of Divine insistency—a poem full of the sad music of humanity, yet a music which fascinates the soul and dispels its "encircling gloom"—its significance may nevertheless be lost in the witchery of its jewelled splendours unless we bear in mind that it is, after all, meant to convey the touching lesson—

I am He Whom thou seekest,
Thou dravest love from thee, who dravest Me.

Strange and startling fancies in words; adjectives that illumine like furnaces in the night; deep sounds and echoes—the sounds of restless humanity in search of the world's witchery—the echoes of the Psalmist's question of old—"Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit, and whither shall I fly from before Thy Face?"—and, underlying all, the pleading of the Father for His prodigal child:—such, in short, is "The Hound of Heaven."

ODE TO THE SETTING SUN

Thou art of Him a type memorial.
Like Him thou hang'st in dreadful pomp of blood
Upon thy Western rood.

ODE TO THE SETTING SUN.

WHATEVER may have been the general method of Francis Thompson in settling the final wording of his poems, he seems to have been at special pains in giving its ultimate form to his "Ode to the Setting Sun." Words, lines, and whole passages have been reshaped since the first appearance of the poem in *Merry England*.[1] A noticeable change lies in the substitution of simpler language, an example of which may be seen in the passage altered from—

Thou sway'st thy sceptred beam
O'er all earth's broad loins teem,
She sweats thee through her pores to verdurous spilth ;
Thou art light in her light,
Thou art might in her might,
Fruitfulness in her fruit, and foizon in her tilth—

in the Ode as it originally appeared, to

[1] *Merry England*, September 1889.

Thou sway'st thy sceptred beam
O'er all delight and dream,
Beauty is beautiful but in thy glance ;
And like a jocund maid
In garland-flowers arrayed,
Before thy ark Earth keeps her sacred dance—

as the lines occur later in the volume of "New Poems."

As the Ode now stands, free from some of the more startling archaisms and coinage of words, it must ever rank as a great spell-binding poem, a pageant of scintillating colour and sound. The marvels and undreamt-of treasures of the wonder-working Sun are drawn out at length, and heaped up, through many a poetic line, for the beholder's gaze. The regal splendours befitting the subject, the ornateness and dignity of the poet's thought, the symbolic references and sacramental vision—conduct the reader along the passage between matter and soul, and show him some of the "many-splendoured things" conceivable only by the mind of the Seer. Something of the majestic strains of Handel's "Largo"; of the soul-filling sweetness of Gounod's "Messe Solennelle"; of the varied lights and raptures of

De Beriot's "Ninth Concerto"; something, too, of the indefinable witchery of certain of Chopin's Nocturnes—surge into the ears as the recital continues. Amid such delights as these is the reader carried from the "world too much with us" to realms of more spacious beauty.

The Ode is divided into three parts. In the Prelude, the setting Sun—"a bubble of fire"—drops slowly, as the poignant music of the violin and harp are borne into the soul. In the Ode proper, the note of sadness—the sunset mood—is continued; the mystical twins of Time—Death and Birth—come into the poet's mind, "and of these two the fairer thing is Death." As in some great musical masterpiece, the opening bars—low, sad, and weird—prepare the way for the cymbals' clang and the full orchestral effects, so here: nor is it long before the "music blasts make deaf the sky." In bewilderingly beautiful language the poet proceeds to depict the splendours of the sun's triumphal dying, and to consider the sway of its sceptred beam from the time of its birth—the time when it burst from the great void's husk and leaped "on the throat o' the dusk." The deluge, "when the ancient heavens did in rains depart"; the lion "maned in tawny

majesty," the tiger "velvet-barred," and the stealthy stepping pard; the entombèd trees (now the light-bearers of the earth); the rose "cupped to the marge with beauty," the "draped" tulip, the "snowed" lily, the earth itself suckled at the breast of the sun, and "scarfed" with the morning light,—these, and many a gorgeous miracle of the sun's working, are examined in turn, and over each the sway of the "spectred beam" is shown. The wind and the wailing voices that should meet from hill, stream, and grove to chant a dirge at the red glare of the sun's fall—the Naiad, Dryad, and Nereid:

The Nymph wan-glimmering by her wan fount's verge—

all are conjured up as in their wonted haunts. And then the scene changes:

A space, and they fleet from me. Must ye fade—
O old, essential candours, ye who made
The earth a living and a radiant thing—
And leave her corpse in our strained, cheated arms?

The poet sees in their departure a resemblance to his own "vanishing—nay, vanished

Day," and his dark mood is only changed by the deferred thought of Eternity, whereat "a rifting light burns through the leaden broodings" of his mind.

O blessèd Sun, thy state
Uprisen or derogate
Dafts me no more with doubt; I seek and find.

In the opening lines of another of his great majestical poems, the "Orient Ode," the poet sees in the Sunrise a symbol of the Church's Benediction Service. Now, in the Setting Sun, he sees a radiant image of the King-maker of Creation, a type indeed of Calvary—

Thou art of Him a type memorial,
Like Him thou hang'st in dreadful pomp of blood
Upon thy Western rood—

and his sadness lifts at the thought, which naturally follows, of the Resurrection.

The vein of triumph thenceforth predominates; for it is the falling acorn buds the tree, and as—

There is nothing lives but something dies—

so, too—

There is nothing dies but something lives—

and though birth and death are inseparable on earth

They are twain yet one, and Death is Birth.

In the after-strain (the concluding part of the Ode) the note of triumph rings again: a message from the tender Queen of Heaven leaves the poet "light of cheer," and in the end he gives thanks for his very griefs:

The restless windward stirrings of whose feather
Prove them the brood of immortality.

The "Ode to the Setting Sun" (written at Storrington in 1889) possesses a unique interest, inasmuch as it was the first poem of length that Thompson wrote after his rescue from the life of poverty in London, and afforded the first all-convincing revelation of the poet's genius. It is one of his "great" poems, full of that princely opulence of imagination which distinguished "New Poems," though short, perhaps, of the matured mysticism of "Orient Ode" or the master-craftsmanship of "An Anthem of Earth"—that marvel of poetic creation—in the same volume.

One of the many functions of poetry is to penetrate beyond the reach of science, and

reveal, in reverential way, certain hidden truths of Nature which, without the imagination of the poet to cross the abysses of dividing space, might remain but irritating and unpictured mysteries. Canon Sheehan expresses this in *The Intellectuals*: "She (Nature) retreats, as we advance, and gathers up her skirts, lest the very swish of them should reveal her hiding-places. There is one, and one only, to whom she reveals herself, and lifts up her veil: and that is her poet."

Such a poet, letting in a flood of many-coloured light upon the world—drawing the veil from the beauty of the Creator's handiwork—and "purging from our inward sight the film of familiarity which obscures from us the wonder of our being" (as in his "Ode to the Setting Sun") is Francis Thompson!

THOMPSON'S "DAISY"

Her beauty smoothed earth's furrowed face!

DAISY.

FRANCIS THOMPSON'S poem "Daisy" has something more suggestive of Wordsworth about it than the mere resemblance of sweet simplicity to "Lucy" and "We are Seven." In a charming little poem written of his beloved sister Dorothy, under the pseudonym of Emmeline, Wordsworth refers to her as "a little Prattler among men," and goes on to say that she gave him love, and thought, and joy:

She gave me eyes, she gave me ears,
And humble cares, and delicate fears;
A heart, a fountain of sweet tears;
And love, and thought, and joy.

Are not all these, in the case of the little Prattler — his sister of an hour — whom Thompson met at Storrington, contained, in childish measure, in her token-gift?

A look, a word of her winsome mouth,
And a wild raspberry.

Was it *quite* unconsciously of the "cares"

and " fears " and " fountain of sweet tears " of Wordsworth, and of Wordsworth's own " Daisy " [1]—

With little here to do or see
Of things that in the great world be,
Sweet Daisy! oft I talk to thee—

(as unconsciously as if they had been non-existent)—that Thompson tells of " the wise, idle, childish things " he talked to *his* Daisy, and the sweetness (albeit the sweetness in the sad) she brought to him? We know at all events that Thompson was thoroughly acquainted with the poetry of Wordsworth (with what great poetry was he not?)—and often spoke of it. We know, too, that the younger poet, out of the vast storehouse of his memory, frequently made use of some thought or suggestion, arising, unconsciously it might be, from the works—a phrase, or single word at times—of others, whether prose or verse. To take an instance (the first that comes to mind) of what is meant: must not the lines from " Sister Songs "—

[1] In the first of the four Wordsworthian " Daisy " poems.

And Summer move on Winter
With the trumpet of the March, and the pennon
of the May—

have had their forerunner in the passage from De Quincey (whose "Confessions," by the way, Thompson knew almost by heart)—

Midsummer like an army with banners, was moving through the heavens—

as surely as the passage (again from "Sister Songs")—

In pairing time, we know, the bird
Kindles to its deepest splendour—

have had its conception in the Tennysonian—

In the Spring a livelier iris changes on the
burnish'd dove . . .?

* * * * *

Much will be written in years to come of those qualities of Thompson which bear affinity to the genius of Wordsworth—or rather of those *dissimilarities* in which is to be found each poet's peculiar strength: the calm austerity of the one, the "passionless" passion of the other; Wordsworth's pensive Daffodil culled so immediately as to have the dew still

fresh upon it—Thompson's correlated flower so linked to things unseen as to trouble by its plucking some far-off star. But all that need be said here is that if Thompson had written no other poems than his gorgeously coloured "Poppy," his "Fallen Yew" (destined, like Wordsworth's "Yew Trees," to "last with stateliest rhyme"), and "Daisy" (the simplest perhaps of all his poems), his right to a place among the poets of Nature would be secure—though it is not as a poet of Nature, but of Nature's God, that he will be primarily known.

* * * * *

Efforts have often been made by visitors to the vicinity to trace the child of the poem—the sweetest flower on Sussex hills that day—but without success. Beautiful she must have been. As in "The Hound of Heaven," it was within the little children's eyes that the poet came nearest to that after which he sought, so doubtless it was in the loveliness of her young eyes (he refers to her "sweet eyes," and again to her "lovely eyes") that the fascination of the Daisy-Flower of Storrington lay. A trifle it may be, but a trifle indicative of the poet's mind, is the fact

that once, at Pantasaph, he singled out from Coventry Patmore the passage

> *What is this maiden fair,*
> *The laughing of* whose eye
> *Is in man's heart renewed virginity—*

for special comment and admiration.

The poem is one of mingled joy and sorrow. It concludes with a verse, the last lines of which—

> *For we are born in others' pain*
> *And perish in our own—*

have often been quoted. Many will wish that the concluding verse had not been written. The poem is complete without it: the poignant grief seems to go beyond the scope of the theme, and to add sadness (if one may so venture to put it) for sadness' sake.

It seems to the present writer that there are two pictures of Francis Thompson which might, conceivably, be painted—and which, executed by an artist worthy of the task, would serve to give a truer idea of the poet—man and soul—than any description in words. The first, mystical of necessity in conception, would need to show him—with thought-consumed

body and ascetic's face—the marks of his scars still fresh upon him—leaning with reverent boldness in the manner of which he himself furnishes a picture in "Any Saint":

And bolder now and bolder
I lean upon that Shoulder,
So dear
He is, and near:
And with His aureole
The tresses of my soul
Are blent
In wished content.

The other (the simpler the better) would depict him talking to the unknown child at Storrington, the beautiful child of whom, as she stood

Breast deep mid flower and spine,

he sings, unforgettably, in "Daisy."

THOMPSON'S LAST POEM: IN NO STRANGE LAND

O World Invisible, we view thee.
IN NO STRANGE LAND.

WHEN Francis Thompson died, early in the winter of 1907, he left among his papers a short unfinished poem bearing the double title:

IN NO STRANGE LAND

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS WITHIN YOU

which is noteworthy as the last and at the same time one of the most characteristic of his mystical works. For in these triumphing stanzas there is held in retrospect—as Mr Meynell puts it—the days and nights of human dereliction which the poet spent beside London's river, and in the shadow—but all radiance to him—of Charing Cross. Obviously differing from his polished masterpiece, "The Hound of Heaven," the shorter poem bears yet a resemblance in that it treats of the world to be discerned by the eyesight that is spiritual, and exhibits a conception of equal daring. Thus the splendid audacity which, in the one,

symbolizes God as the pursuing Hound, depicts, in the other, Jacob's ladder pitched betwixt Heaven and Charing Cross,[1] and Christ walking on the water *not of Gennesareth but Thames!*

Though Thompson has been styled a "mighty mystic," he has many pieces of sweet simplicity. His lines on a "Snowflake," and his verses entitled "July Fugitive," "A Dead Astronomer," "After her going"—are, among others—such as a child can understand; and in the last gift of his muse he has left an epitome of his life's verse, expressed in a clear and striking form, the beauty and significance of which few can miss.

It is when dealing with his favourite subject of the intimacy of God that the poet whose heart was warmed by the Divine Presence even as he sold matches in the street, displays his most distinctive gifts. Here, compressed in the space of twenty-four lines, is to be found the very inmost of his thought, combined with a lustrous simplicity befitting the vehicle of his final message. Many who find themselves breathless in the elevation of "The Hound of

[1] An interesting similarity of thought is suggested by the "Jacob's ladder" line of Thompson's poem and verse 2 of Tennyson's "Early Spring."

Heaven" will, in the later lines, be able to follow the mind of the poet with ease, and grasp the import of his teaching to the full.

It has been said of another of our English poets (Chatterton) that he was "Poetry's Martyr." The description applies to Thompson too, and in a nobler sense. The hopes of his youth blighted—crushed, as it seemed, on every side—it was the equally bitter lot of Francis Thompson to learn by experience that "turning love's bread is bought at hunger's price," and to find himself (in words of his own telling)—

Like one who sweats before a despot's gate,
Summoned by some presaging scroll of fate,
And knows not whether kiss or dagger wait;
And all so sickened is his countenance,
That courtiers buzz, "Lo, doomed!" and look
at him askance.[1]

Yet, racked as he was, he stood true to his visions with enduring patience, and with a courage comparable to that of the field of battle. His was the martyrdom of living: to deliver his message, he prolonged his life, so full of physical pain, to the utmost. That

[1] "Sister Songs."

he lived so long was due to his unconquerable mind, his indomitable will to live—to live and sanctify the suffering of his emaciated nerve-tortured body.

Through all the outer darkness of his "uncompanioned" days, the poet of the Light within remained the same rapt celebrant of the soul, feasting his gaze on the world invisible, and proclaiming the high things that lie beyond the lowly. The very bitterness of his trials only strengthened his assurance in the reality of the hidden splendours of which he testifies. What wonder, then, that his last testimony should be of such special significance and potentiality?

The angels keep their ancient places;—
Turn but a stone, and start a wing!
'Tis ye, 'tis your estrangèd faces,
That miss the many-splendoured thing.

* * * * *

Yea, in the night, my Soul, my daughter,
Cry,—clinging Heaven by the hems;
And lo, Christ walking on the water,
Not of Gennesareth, but Thames!

Surely, the angels must have "clapped their hands" with delight as the poem proceeded.

What "The Hound of Heaven" is among the poet's longer pieces, his poem of the Vision of Thames—unpolished and unfinished though it be—is among the shorter. Both are adorned by tears and sunshine, and both are the channels of his profoundest message—

Heaven in Earth, and God in Man! [1]

[1] This line occurs in Crashaw's "Hymn of the Nativity."